

# THE POLITICS OF THE UNPOLITICAL

*By the same Author*

COLLECTED POEMS : 1914-34  
COLLECTED ESSAYS IN LITERARY CRITICISM  
ANNALS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE  
THE GREEN CHILD  
ART NOW  
THE MEANING OF ART  
ART AND INDUSTRY  
ART AND SOCIETY  
EDUCATION THROUGH ART  
POETRY AND ANARCHISM  
IN DEFENCE OF SHELLEY  
WORDSWORTH  
ENGLISH PROSE STYLE  
A COAT OF MANY COLOURS

*Anthologies :*

THE LONDON BOOK OF ENGLISH PROSE  
(with Bonamy Dobree)  
THE ENGLISH VISION  
THE KNAPSACK

*Herbert Read*

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THE POLITICS  
OF THE UNPOLITICAL

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## NOTE

NEARLY all the essays collected in this volume were written in war-time, or given as lectures to war-time audiences, but I have submitted the material to a good deal of revision and rearrangement to give it unity and continuity. The fourth essay has already seen separate publication as a pamphlet in the Democratic Order Series (Kegan Paul); the eleventh as a contribution to a symposium published eight years ago (Wishart). Two of the essays appeared in *Horizon*, others in *The Studio*, *Now*, *Transformation*, *Message*, and *The Journal of Education*; one was delivered as a lecture to the Fabian Society, another to the annual congress of the National Union of Students. There are shorter passages incorporated from other sources, and I gratefully tender my thanks to those editors who gave my opinions their first publicity.

H. R.



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## The Politics of the Unpolitical

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*If certain writers feel emancipated enough from all that is human—they would say intellectual enough—to continue to fulfil, under any circumstances whatever, the strange functions of purely abstract thought, good luck to them. But those who can only conceive their rôle as writers to be a means of experiencing more deeply and of establishing more fully a mode of existence which they want to be human, those who only write in order to feel themselves living integrally—such people no longer have the right to be disinterested. The trend of events, and the evolution of ideas, if they run out their course, will lead straight to an unparalleled deformation of the individual human being. Whoever gazes into the future which is being forged for us, and can there perceive the monstrous and denatured brother whom one will necessarily resemble, cannot react except by a revolt into extreme egoism. It is this egoism which must now be rehabilitated. To-day the problem of the person effaces all others. The intelligence is placed in such circumstances that for it disinterestedness and resignation come to the same thing.*

THIERRY MAULNIER, *La Crise est dans l'homme*  
(Paris, 1932).

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THE politics of the unpolitical—these are the politics of those who desire to be pure in heart: the politics of men without personal ambition; of those who have not desired wealth or an unequal share of worldly possessions; of those who have always striven, whatever their race or condition, for human

this unselfish devotion to the good of humanity, and the Sermon on the Mount is the source of all the politics of the unpolitical. But others who came before Christ and who may have influenced him elaborated their political ideals in pureness of heart—Lao-Tsū and Zeno, for example; and among Christ's direct disciples we must include several philosophers and prophets nearer to our time, whose message is still insistent, and directly applicable to our present condition—Ruskin and Kropotkin, Morris and Tolstoy, Gandhi and Eric Gill. These modern representatives of what we might well call an ancient tradition form a closely interrelated body of thought: Gandhi, for example, has declared his debt to Ruskin and Tolstoy; Gill is a disciple of Morris, who was himself a disciple of Ruskin; Kropotkin was closely associated with Morris. Ruskin, in this succession, has a certain pre-eminence and originality: the vitality and transforming power<sup>1</sup> of his writings seem to come straight from his deep study of the Bible and from his prolonged meditation on the words of Christ; though he had in himself that rare power which Gandhi recognized as the specifically poetic power—his power “to call forth the good latent in the human breast”. We are still far from estimating the full extent of this great man's influence, but we can describe it as ethical and aesthetic rather than as religious or political. Ruskin's eloquence did not bring into being either a new sect or a new party: his power is emotive and not calculative, and in this as in other respects he is nearly related to Rousseau, having for our own revolutionary period almost exactly the same significance as Rousseau had for the French Revolutionary period. We may still come to regard *Unto this Last* as the *Contrat Social* of a new society—as the Manifesto of those communists who renounce political action in their efforts to establish a new society.

Of the six names mentioned, Morris was the only one who compromised on this political issue, but he never, to the end of his life, reconciled himself to the political methods advocated

<sup>1</sup> “The one book that brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life was *Unto this Last*.”—*Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story* (London, 1930), p. 163.

by his friends. His lecture on "The Policy of Abstention" (1887) is the best statement of the case against parliamentary action ever made in English, and it is a pity that it is so entirely forgotten by socialists to-day, and that it is only available in a limited and expensive publication.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of his life Gandhi also, it might be said, has made a tactical compromise of some kind with the politically minded leaders of the Congress Party. With them he has worked in close association since 1921, but always in a relationship which he himself has described as "experimental". For the whole of Gandhi's life and teaching have been directed against parliamentary action: the doctrine of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, rejects the violence of majority government no less decisively than the violence of military oppression. But before accusing Gandhi of political compromise, it would be necessary to know in much more detail the motives which have determined his recent activities; we must wait for the outcome of his final attempt to liberate India.

It is characteristic of these six teachers that although they would be included among the most revolutionary figures of the past hundred years, we do not spontaneously associate the word "democracy" with any of them. Democracy is a very ambiguous word, and its meanings vary from a sentimental sympathy for the poor and oppressed such as we get in Christian Socialism, to a ruthless dogma of proletarian dictatorship such as we have seen established in Russia. Our Six were all democrats in the former sense; none of them was a democrat in the latter sense. But it is an important distinction, and if in the name of democracy we are more and more inevitably compelled to commit ourselves to the political machinery of the state—to the nationalization of industry, to the bureaucratic control of all spheres of life and to the doctrine of the infallibility of the People (divinely invested in a unique Party)—then it is time to renounce the democratic label and seek a less equivocal name. My use of the word

<sup>1</sup> *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, by May Morris (2 vols. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), vol. ii. pp. 434-53.

"democracy" in the pages which follow is always subject to this consideration.

A complete renunciation of the word is not easy: indeed, it has been deliberately made difficult for us, not only by the common usage of many ardent seekers after the truth, but also by the deliberate propaganda of the enemies of liberty. A common form of this Machiavellian sophistry consists in presenting your opponent with an apparently inescapable alternative—an "either/or" which you accept as covering all the known facts. In our own time, in the sphere of world politics, this either/or is *either* democracy *or* fascism. Such an alternative seems to leave communism out of account, but not in reality. If you question people about the relation of communism to democracy, the communists among them will tell you that communism is the extreme form of democracy, and the anti-communists will say that communism as it exists in Russia is merely another form of totalitarianism.

Both these views are right. Communism is an extreme form of democracy, and it is totalitarian: but equally the totalitarian state in the form of fascism is an extreme form of democracy. All forms of socialism, whether state socialism of the Russian kind, or national socialism of the German kind, or democratic socialism of the British kind, are professedly democratic: that is to say, they all obtain popular assent by the manipulation of mass psychology. All are actually majority governments. It has often been pointed out that in some ways the organization of society in Nazi Germany is much more thoroughly democratic than the organization of society in Great Britain or the United States. The German army is more democratic than the British army; the German industrial system is more democratic than the capitalist industrial system; German finance is more democratically controlled than finance in a plutocracy like ours. In Germany power and responsibility are not the prerogatives of birth or wealth, but are delegated to the holders of office in a party organization; and though such a system is strongly oppressive of individual freedom and therefore not democratic in the libertarian sense of the word, it is at least as



democratic as a system which delegates the symbols of authority to a parliament and leaves the real power in the hands of those who control the financial system. National Socialism relates justice to service and group loyalty, which may not be defensible from an abstract ethical point of view; but it is at least an improvement on a system which confuses justice with the competitive struggles of the jungle. It is mere hypocrisy on the part of democratic propagandists to pretend that Great Britain or the United States enjoy some mythical happiness or freedom which is denied to the Germans, the Russians, or the Italians. We "enjoy" chaos just as they "enjoy" order; we "enjoy" licence, they "discipline"; the choice is in each case equally democratic.

I am not suggesting that the democracies of Great Britain and Germany are identical. I am only pointing out that fascism in Germany is a form of democracy, even if an arbitrary one; it is only its extremism which accounts for its intolerance. It is to be observed, however, that political democracy even in Great Britain grows more intolerant day by day, and not merely under the pressure of war. The pressure of an economic system which inevitably proceeds towards monopoly—that is to say, towards a unified control designed to maintain the security of profits and wages—brings about a form of government which, however democratic in appearance, is essentially totalitarian.

The weaknesses of democracy have been exposed by every political philosopher since Plato and Aristotle. Even Rousseau, the so-called Father of Democracy, rejected it as a system practicable for any society larger than a city state. The philosophers, being men of intelligence, have never been able to suggest anything better than a dictatorship of the intelligentsia; but knowing how unlikely it is that such a dictatorship would be long tolerated by the ignorant masses, they have tried to disguise the inevitability of some alternative form of dictatorship under a picturesque formula. Historically the most effective of these is constitutional monarchy. It has always been recognized that a king might easily degenerate into a tyrant, but

his natural life is limited and can at a pinch be artificially shortened; whereas the reign of an aristocracy, which is the next best possibility, has no mensurable limit: it can only be brought to an end by a civil war with all its miseries.

The plain fact about democracy is that it is a physical impossibility. In an aggregation of millions of individuals such as we always have in modern society, we may get government *of* the people and even government *for* the people, but never for a moment government *by* the people. But that is the essential test, for if a people does not govern itself, it is governed by somebody else; *ipso facto* it is no longer a democracy. This is not merely a logical quibble: democracy never has in fact existed in modern times. In our own country, for example, the monarchical system was overthrown by an oligarchy, and since the "Great" Revolution of 1688 we have been governed by a succession of oligarchies, which might be Whig or might be Tory, might represent the landed interests or the moneyed interests, but never for a moment represented the people as a whole. In our own time a new oligarchy, the oligarchy of the trade unions, as exclusive a caste as ever aspired to power, has competed, luckily in vain, for the control of the state. It is now openly merging itself with the ascendant oligarchy of monopoly capitalism, to form what James Burnham has called "the managerial class".

All this is such an obvious interpretation of the historical facts that no one but a fool can deceive himself in the belief that democracy has ever been, or is ever likely to be, a reality in a modern industrial community. A constitutional monarchy as a cloak to competing sectional interests, as a symbol of unity in a society which would otherwise disintegrate from ruthless class warfare—that is the definition of the British constitution. The French Third Republic, the United States of America, and the Third Reich are all constitutions of the same character: they only differ in nomenclature and the trimming on their uniforms.

Nevertheless this must be said (if only in justification of the lip service which so many of us have paid to democracy at various times): the political doctrine known as democracy has

implied an important principle which, if it were not systematically misinterpreted and misunderstood, would still justify us in using the word. This is the *principle of equality*—an ethical doctrine, even a religious dogma. The equality of man implies many things, but never its literal meaning. No one believes that all men are equal in capacity or talent: they are in fact outrageously diverse. But nevertheless, in Christian phraseology, they are all equal in the sight of God; and to affirm our common humanity is the first article of freedom. Whatever government we establish, whatever way of life we follow, all our faith is built on error unless we respect the rights of the person—that is to say, his right to be a person, a unique entity, “human left, from human free”.

This is the fundamental doctrine of a Christian community and of all other types of essential communism. It is even fundamental to the communism of Marx and Engels. But the equality acknowledged by democracy has in practice been something very different. God has been eliminated from the formula and we are left with a mere equalization or levelling of man with man. The spiritual measure has been discarded, and man is left to dangle in material scales; and for centuries the counter-weight has been a piece of silver. The only way in which democracy has been able to assess equality is in the terms of money, and it is the inability of the trade union movement, especially in Great Britain and Germany, to break away from this cash valuation of humanity which has, more than any other single factor, made the democratic working-class movement a futile diversion of revolutionary effort.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chiefly because it has prevented the workers from concentrating on the enhancement of their human dignity by the acquisition of responsibility for the direction and control of industry. But also because, as Franz Borkenau has shown so effectively, it has prevented the development of international solidarity among the workers, for the wage-rate is directly dependent on the international market, not only of labour, but of commodities. For this reason the workers have been forced to realize that their interests are bound up, not only with the interests of their employers, but also with the competitive expansion of the national capital. Cf. F. Borkenau, *Socialism, National or International* (Routledge, 1942).

By what values a man shall be judged absolutely we will not discuss here, but socially, as a man among his fellow-men, he should be judged by his creative ability, by his power to add to the common stock of goods. The value of a man is the value of the art he practises—whether it is the art of healing or the art of making music, the art of road-mending or the art of cooking. We might place first of all the art of making children, because on that the continuance of the human race depends. Procreation is perhaps the only art which is literally creative: the rest of the arts are merely inventive.

For this and for reasons more strictly sociological, our social philosophy must begin with the family. The Pope is right, the Archbishop of Canterbury is right, Pétain is right; the psychoanalysts and the anthropologists are right. The Stalinists are wrong, the Nazis are wrong, our own democratic socialists and public school fascists are wrong, for they all exalt the state above the family. From whatever realistic angle we approach the problems of human life, the family is seen as the integral unit, without which there is no social organization, no social progress, no social order or human happiness. But we must insist that this is a sociological problem, and we must dissociate ourselves from those who think it can be solved by moral persuasion. Families are encouraged and sustained by security of life and property, decent housing, and an environment in which nurture and education can be natural and serene. Morality and religion may give their sanction to the social unit thus established: it is the fascist way of thinking to imagine that such sanctions are a substitute for economic action.

The next essential group is the guild—the association of men and women according to their calling or practical function. (I obstinately retain the word “guild”, in spite of its medieval and sentimental associations, because it is more human, and euphonious, than such expressions as “collective”, “co-operative”, “soviet”, etc.). The guild is a vertical and not a horizontal organization: it includes all persons associated together in the production of a particular commodity. The agricultural guild, for example, would include the drivers and

mechanics who run the tractors: the engineers' guild would include the men who make the tractors. But the vertical organization will be divided into regional and district units, and the main business of the guilds will always take place in the district units; decisions will arise out of personal contacts and not from the abstract and legalistic conclaves of a central bureau.

Decentralization is thus also of the essence of this alternative to democracy. "Real politics are local politics", and power and authority should be devolved and segmented to the utmost limit of practicability. Only in such a way can the person—every person in society—be assured of an adequate sense of responsibility and human dignity. These qualities for the average person only emerge in his actual sphere of work and in his regional environment.

The trend to centralization is a disease of democracy, and not, as is so often assumed, of the machine. It arises inevitably from the concentration of power in parliament, from the separation made between responsibility and creative activity, from the massing of production for greater profits and higher wages. The evolution of democracy is parallel to the growth of centralization, and centralization is in no sense an inevitable process. The present war has revealed its extraordinary inefficiency. Have not the guerillas of Yugoslavia shown more initiative than the bureaucrats of Whitehall? The centralization of control in a democratic state is clumsy, inhuman and inert. Incapable of thought, originality or enterprise, it can only act under the dictatorship of a Hitler or a Churchill—even the shrill voices of an exasperated Press have no effect on it.

The health and happiness of society depend on the labour and science of its members; but neither health nor happiness is possible unless that work and science are directed and controlled by the workers themselves. A guild is by definition autonomous and self-governing. Every man who is a master of his craft acquires thereby the right to a voice in the direction of his workshop. He also acquires security of tenure and of income. Indeed, his income and his tenure should depend on his qualifications rather than on the tally of his labours. He

should begin to receive an income from the moment he has chosen a calling and been admitted as an apprentice to a trade or profession—which will be long before he has left school. His income will rise with his qualifications, and will depend entirely on his qualifications. Any rational society will naturally make use of the services of a qualified worker, because it thereby increases the general well-being. If it fails to do so, that society is restricting production; and if such restriction is in the general interest, then society should pay the worker for his qualifications until they can be used, or otherwise pay the worker to train and acquire more immediately useful qualifications. The talents and acquired skill of a person are his property: his contribution to the common wealth. Society should be organized to secure the maximum utilization of its inherent wealth, and the productive organizations themselves will then decide how this common wealth is best increased—by machinery or handicraft, by large factories or small workshops, in towns or villages. The human values involved, and not an abstract and numerical profit, will be the criterion.

Education, in such a society, is initiation. It is the revelation of innate capacities, the training of these capacities in socially useful activities, the disciplining of these activities to aesthetic and moral ends.

Such a natural organization of society leaves little activity to the state as such. The state remains merely as the arbiter, to decide in the interests of the whole the conflicts which emerge in the parts. Such a function is already exercised by an independent judiciary, which might well extend its functions to cover the rights of the citizen as consumer. An Economic Council, constituted by much the same means as the Bench, would be necessary to safeguard society as a whole against a policy of restrictionism in any particular guild, to direct the general volume of production and to maintain a balanced output among its tributary guilds. It is difficult to see the necessity for any other central authority. The Board of Education, for example, would be in fact as well as in name a board of education—an autonomous body charged with the

task of educating the nation's children, governed and directed by those responsible for this task. The Bankers' Guild would carry out the functions of the Treasury and the Banks, in so far as these functions are necessary in a society whose production is organized for use and not for profit. And so for all the economic functions of society.

All this may seem to amount to a programme far more definite and dogmatic than the title of my essay promised, but to be unpolitical does not mean to be without politics: every attitude that is more than egoistic is to that extent social, and a social attitude is a political attitude. But it is one thing to have politics, and another thing to pursue them. It is one thing to have a faith, and another thing to trade on the credulity of the faithful. It is not the substance of politics we should object to, but the methods of the politician. We should refuse to invest our private interests in a public policy, for we know that what cannot be won by a change of heart, which is also a revolution of reason, is only won by cheats and impostors. Above all, we should realize by now that a new order will never be won by old pensioners, among whom are to be numbered the six hundred and fifteen pawns of our party system.

Let me summarize the essential features of a natural society:

- I. The liberty of the person.
- II. The integrity of the family.
- III. The reward of qualifications.
- IV. The self-government of the guilds.
- V. The abolition of parliament and centralized government.
- VI. The institution of arbitrament.
- VII. The delegation of authority.
- VIII. The humanization of industry.

The social order thus envisaged is international because it is essentially pacific: it is pacific because it is essentially international. It aims at the production of world-wide plenty, at the humanization of work, and at the eradication of all economic conflicts. It may be, as some philosophers hold, that an aggressive instinct is innate in man, and that no organization

of society can guard against its expression. In that case the world can only be made tolerable in the degree that this instinct can be controlled by reason. Reason has no chance if men are starving, or even if they have undue cause for envy. But granted an economy which is no longer competitive, in which the highest yield of production is wisely and evenly distributed among all mankind, then reason will have a chance. Instincts are not immutable: they can be transformed, sublimated, diverted into creative channels. Energy itself is not evil: it only becomes evil by being applied to evil ends.

The world is waiting for a new faith—especially the youth of the world is waiting for a new faith. The old institutions, the old parties, are dead at the roots: they receive no refreshment. The young men and women stand apart, indifferent, inactive. But do not let us mistake their indifference for apathy, their inactivity for laziness. Intellectually, they are very wide awake. But they have rejected our abstract slogans and the hollow institutions in which old men gibber about freedom, democracy and culture. They don't want freedom if it means the freedom to exploit their fellow-men: they don't want democracy if it means the ridiculous bagmen of Westminster; they don't want culture if it means the intellectual dope of our academies and universities. They want to get rid of the profiteers and the advertising men, the petty tyrannical bureaucrats and the screaming journalists, the clubmen and the still too numerous flock of rentiers for ever cackling over their threatened nest-eggs. They want a world that is morally clean and socially just, naturally productive and aesthetically beautiful. And they know they won't get it from any of the existing parties, from any of the existing political systems. They hate fascism, they recoil from communism, and they despise democracy. They are groping towards a new faith, a new order, a new world. They are not a party and never will be a party: they have no name and will perhaps never have a name. But they will act, and onto the ruins of war they will cast the tarnished baubles and stale furnishings of those parliaments which brought death and despair to two successive generations of young men.



## 2

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# The Cult of Leadership

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*I am against bigness and greatness in all their forms, and with the invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, stealing in through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, and yet rending the hardest monuments of man's pride, if you give them time. The bigger the unit you deal with, the hollower, the more brutal, the more mendacious is the life displayed. So I am against all big organizations as such, national ones first and foremost; against all big successes and big results; and in favour of the eternal forces of truth which always work in the individual and immediately unsuccessful way, underdogs always, till history comes, after they are long dead, and puts them on the top.*

WILLIAM JAMES, *Letters*, II, 90.

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IN more than one of these essays I am concerned to show that from a certain point of view there is nothing to choose between fascism and democracy—that the economic and military antagonisms inherent in modern civilization involve both fascism and democracy alike and constitute irrecoverable encroachments on the physical and spiritual liberty of the person. The incursions of democracy are far more dangerous because they are far more deceitful. They are always accompanied by a smoke-screen of righteousness which hides their real nature and dimensions, even from many who are most salient in the attack. The very preamble of this menacing strategy is the cult of leadership, for this cult is essentially the denial of that principle of equality upon which alone a community of free individuals can be established.

Fascism is a complex social phenomenon for which there is no single or simple explanation. It is obviously not a national phenomenon—it has triumphed in Latin Italy no less than in Nordic Germany, and some of its symptoms have been diagnosed in this country and the United States of America. I do not think it is worth wasting any time on the proposition—sedulously disseminated as part of our war propaganda—that fascism is the inevitable development of certain historical trends in Germany. Germany was the weakest spot in the body of world politics, and for that reason it was most easily and most successfully infected by the disease. That weakness in the political structure of Germany can be explained historically, and German philosophers have quite naturally tended to find elaborate justifications for it. But if a disease like cancer attacks, say, the liver, it is quite unscientific to say that the liver is the cause of the cancer. Cancer is a disease of the whole body which may become manifest in the liver or any other “weak spot”

I do not wish to dismiss the historical origins of fascism as of no importance: they do explain why the disease should develop in one nation rather than in another. History investigates the organic tissue of society just as histology investigates the organic tissue of the human body. History is always *post mortem*—it can tell us *why* this happened *here*. But it cannot explain the processes governing the immediate emotions of the collective organisms we call states or nations. The only science that can attempt such an explanation is psychology.

It will be said that I have forgotten economics. Marxians in particular will be eager to point out that I have forgotten my dialectical materialism, but I would claim to have remembered my dialectics as well as my materialism. There is no doubt that economic factors have played an enormous part in the growth of fascism. Hitler himself is fond of tracing the origins of his success to the injustices of the Versailles Treaty, which was an undisguised expression of economic forces. He is not so fond of admitting what is equally true, that he was helped to power by certain groups of capitalists. But the fact that the most powerful of these capitalists, Thyssen, is an exile and

perhaps even a corpse, shows how little essential unity there was between the two parties. If Hitler represented any economic interest, it was that of the "little man", the bankrupt shopkeeper, the small capitalist who had been put out of business by the big monopolies and chain stores.<sup>1</sup> But even this sympathy was not genuine.

The economic origins of fascism have been traced by more than one writer. In the period after the last war it was the middle class, and particularly the *lower* middle class, that found itself threatened by the sudden growth of monopolist capitalism. It developed an acute state of anxiety, even of panic: a psychological neurosis that led to a craving for leadership and a craving for submission. It was of this state of mind, this disease of the spirit, that Hitler took advantage. It is a development in mass psychology which has been very acutely analysed by Erich Fromm in his recently published book, *The Fear of Freedom*.<sup>2</sup> According to Dr. Fromm, Hitler succeeded so well because he was able to combine the qualities of a resentful petty-bourgeois, with whom the middle classes could identify themselves, emotionally and socially, with those of an opportunist ready to serve the interests of the German industrialists and Junkers. In actual fact, Hitler has not fulfilled his promise to the middle classes—or only to some few of them. But now that does not matter, because he has the excuse of the war for his failure.

This is not the place, nor would I at any time feel competent, to undertake an analysis of the economic principles of the National Socialist movement. Some people—Dr. Fromm, for example—believe that such principles do not exist; that the only principle professed by the Nazis is a radical opportunism. I think this is a dangerous simplification. It is true that fascism is not basically an expression of economic forces: to

<sup>1</sup> "We want our middle class, which is becoming poorer and poorer and whose means of livelihood are cut off more and more by large business concerns, to be placed in a position where they can have their share in these goods."—Hitler in an interview with a representative of the Associated Press, 1932.

<sup>2</sup> London (Kegan Paul), 1942.

accept that view would be to accept the Marxist interpretation of history, and never for a moment, in theory or in practice, has Hitler done that. His movement is an attempt to deny this principle, and to put in its place a principle of the particular endowment of races, and in the final analysis of individuals within the race. Achievement is the result of specific genius or capacity and not of blind forces. Let me quote a key passage from one of Hitler's own speeches:

"The greatness of a people is the result not of the sum of all its achievements but in the last resort of the sum of its outstanding achievements. Let no one say that the picture produced as a first impression of human civilization is the impression of its achievement as a whole. This whole edifice of civilization is in its foundations and in all its stones nothing else than the result of the creative capacity, the achievement, the intelligence, the industry of individuals: in its greatest triumphs it represents the great crowning achievement of individual god-favoured geniuses, in its average accomplishment the achievement of men of average capacity, and in its sum doubtless the result of the use of human labour-force in order to turn to account the creations of genius and of talent. So it is only natural that when the capable intelligences of a nation, which are always in a minority, are regarded as only of the same value as all the rest, then genius, capacity, the value of personality are slowly subjected to the majority, and this process is then falsely named the rule of the people. For this is not the rule of the people, but in reality the rule of stupidity, of mediocrity, of half-heartedness, of cowardice, of weakness, and of inadequacy. Rule of the people means rather that a people should allow itself to be governed and led by its most capable individuals, those who are born to the task, and not that a chance majority which of necessity is alien to these tasks should be permitted to administer all spheres of life." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From a speech delivered to the Industry Club in Düsseldorf, 27th January 1932. From *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, trans. by Norman H. Baynes (Oxford, 1942), vol. i. pp. 784-5.

This is a classic formulation of the doctrine of leadership. In effect it is the doctrine of power politics, and power politics have always shown an extreme contempt for economics and even for reason. Civilization may owe its highest achievements to individual god-favoured geniuses, but there has always been something haphazard in their incidence, and it is also true that civilization owes its darkest hours to evil geniuses who have been equally individual. A secure civilization cannot be based on such a gamble, and it is only individuals who hope to benefit from such a gamble who erect it into a historical principle. In this way they hope to disguise their naked craving for power, which is the fundamental factor in all their thoughts and actions. This craving for power is an irrational force—it can no more be explained by economic factors than a craving for drink or for drugs, though, like these cravings, it can be encouraged or thwarted by economic factors.

The necessary analysis of that craving for power, which is the basic factor in the psychology of fascism, has been done, most convincingly in my opinion, by the writer just quoted, Dr. Fromm. Any such analysis involves the use of more technical terms than are justified in the present context, but let me try to summarize Dr. Fromm's argument very briefly. It begins dialectically enough with economic and historical factors—with the historical struggle of man to gain freedom from the political, economic and spiritual shackles which bound him through long centuries of darkness and despair. It shows that time after time man has been afraid to use the freedom he has gained, and has fallen back on some alternative system of control. He has submissively held up his wrists to a new gaoler—some new authoritarian religion, like calvinism; some new economic tyranny, like capitalism. The individual, it seems, is afraid to be alone. "To feel completely alone and isolated leads to mental disintegration, just as physical starvation leads to death". The individual craves for relatedness, for union and, Fromm points out, "even being related to the basest kind of pattern is immensely preferable to being alone. Religion and nationalism, as well as any custom and any belief however

absurd and degrading, if it only connects the individual with others, are refuges from what man most dreads: isolation". Dr. Fromm then quotes a very effective passage from Balzac:

"But learn one thing, impress it upon your mind which is still so malleable: man has a horror of aloneness. And of all kinds of aloneness, moral aloneness is the most terrible. The first hermits lived with God. They inhabited the world which is most populated, the world of the spirits. The first thought of man, be he a leper or a prisoner, a sinner or an invalid, is: to have a companion of his fate. In order to satisfy this drive which is life itself, he applies all his strength, all his power, the energy of his whole life."<sup>1</sup>

The true solution of this problem implies communism, but communism in the original sense of the word, as used by anarchists, and not in the sense used by Marxians and their opponents. I mean communism conceived as a spontaneous association of individuals for mutual aid. But lacking this rational conception, man has only been able to get rid of his isolation by desperate means—by those psychological obsessions which we call sadism and masochism. Sadism is the unconscious impulse to acquire unrestricted power over another person, and to test the fullness of this power by destroying that other person. Masochism is the unconscious impulse to dissolve oneself in the power of another person and to participate in his annihilating power. Fascism is the combined expression of these two unconscious impulses—its peculiarity resides in this ambivalence, this continual shifting from one impulse to the other, from sadistic destructiveness to masochistic submissiveness.

There is no need to illustrate these characteristics from the behaviour of the fascist parties in Germany and Italy: that has been done in hundreds of books, and Hitler's own book, *Mein Kampf*, is at once a case-book and a text-book of these psychological aberrations. The Nazi leaders are driven by an overwhelming lust for power—that fact needs no demonstration. The Nazi followers are driven by an equally overwhelming lust to surrender themselves to this power.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

Fromm's thesis, then, is that these sadistic and masochistic trends in modern history explain the inability of the isolated individual to stand alone, to make use of the freedom he has gained. Accepting this as a convincing explanation of the psychological forces underlying fascism, let us now consider whether there do not exist among us certain tendencies of the same nature—tendencies which, if not checked, will inevitably lead to fascism, whatever the outcome of the present war.

The most prevalent manifestation of these latent tendencies is the universal demand for leadership, a demand which, not only by implication, but even in expression, is identical with the Nazi doctrine. Schools are urged to train boys for "the tasks of leadership", students are asked to develop the qualities of leadership, selection boards make these same qualities the criterion of their choice of candidates for commissions in the army, navy and air force. Even workers are urged to select their leaders—their shop stewards and shift leaders. In the political sphere we have adopted the *Führerprinzip* without qualification. We don't call Mr. Churchill our "Führer", but we give him all the attributes of a Führer, and he has not shown any unwillingness to accept them.

Before we examine what is involved in this general desire for leadership, let us distinguish a quality which is often confused with leadership, and is perhaps always incorporated in it. I mean the quality of individual initiative. This is fundamentally the impulse to originate, to construct, and, in relation to other individuals, the desire to distinguish oneself. It is a self-expressive impulse, and has nothing in common with the will to power.

Now this realization of the self—the expression of the uniqueness of the individual—is, as I shall emphasize presently, one of the most essential features of an organic community, and must be preserved at all costs. But the individual can only realize himself in the community; or rather, the difference between realizing oneself *in* the community and realizing oneself *in spite of* the community is precisely the distinction I want to make. In the one case, the uniqueness of the individual

becomes part of the pattern of society; in the other case, the individual remains outside the pattern, an unassimilated and therefore essentially neurotic element.

What I think emerges from these considerations is that the failure of democracy to realize an integrated pattern of society is largely due to its reliance on leaders. Through generations we have spent our blood and expended our utmost efforts on getting rid of the leadership of priests and kings, aristocrats and captains of industry, only to find that it has all been futile, only to find ourselves with the same infantile longing to be led. We talk about the brotherhood of man, about comradeship and co-operation, and these phrases do describe the deepest instincts of humanity; but in actual fact we are children seeking a father, brothers and sisters full of mutual jealousy and suspicion, repeating on a national scale the neurotic conflicts of the family.

It may be argued that, however beautiful they may be as ideals, brotherhood, comradeship and co-operation are impracticable modes of conducting the business of a state in peace and war—especially in war. We are told that in war we must have discipline, and discipline implies command and obedience, commanders and obeyers, officers and privates. But in the past ten years the falseness of that assumption has been clearly demonstrated. It was clearly demonstrated in the last war, though victory had the unfortunate effect of making it unnecessary for us to learn the lessons of that conflict. But those lessons, which received a striking confirmation in the Spanish Civil War, were not lost on our enemies, and their successes in Poland, in France, in Greece and everywhere except in Russia, where they came up against an army that had learned the same lesson, is due precisely to what might be called the democratization of the army.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Russian evidence is not unequivocal: cf. General Drasil-nikov, in an article quoted by A. Werth in *Moscow*, '41, p. 85: "Present-day warfare requires such enormous moral tension that only the most firmly disciplined troops can face it, and maintain their fighting power intact. That is why such drastic steps have had to be taken towards the final liquidation of the pseudo-democratic traditions in the army, traditions which only undermined discipline." But, according to Werth



Several independent witnesses have confirmed the genuineness of this process of democratization in the German army. Shirer, for example, in his *Berlin Diary*, reports that—

“Few people who have not seen it in action realize how different this army is from the one the Kaiser sent hurtling into Belgium and France in 1914. . . . The great gulf between officers and men is gone in this war. There is a sort of himself, the situation is now very different: “Since the war began, and since this article was written, the political commissars have, of course, had their power restored; though not at the expense of the officers. Roughly speaking, the officer is, as before, responsible for the military operations; but the political commissar is the man who is in charge of the troops’ morale, and, incidentally, of the officers’ morale.” But the commissars were finally abolished by Stalin’s decree on 11th October 1942. Commenting on this news, the *Times* special correspondent in Moscow observed:

“When the system of political commissars was introduced, the young Red Army was officered by many men whose loyalty to the revolutionary régime was suspect, and who were only retained in the army because of the shortage of trained officers. Since then, however, the Red Army’s military academies have created commanders who are completely identified with the régime and whose thoughts and language are the same as those of the men they command [my italics]. There will still be a need for political education in the army. As before, the Red Army man will be told the significance of the operations in which he is playing a part, however small. But the division of duties that was summed up in M. Stalin’s phrase of 1919 that the regimental commissar is the father and soul of the regiment; while the commander is its will, will no longer be so precise. The best of the present commissars will become commanders, and all Red Army commanders will have political aides subordinate to them.”

On the same date (12th October) the *Times* reported a further development in the German army, designed to remove the final traces of class distinction between the officers and their men:

“According to an announcement by the High Command, candidates for commissioned rank in the German Army need not in future hold a school leaving certificate or have attended a particular type of school.

“The essential qualifications, in addition to ‘character and pure Aryan blood’, are to be ‘worthiness for army service, readiness to serve Nationalist-Socialist Germany and its Führer, and idealism’.

“The German News Agency remarks that this decision follows Hitler’s recent declaration that ‘every man in the National-Socialist army carries a field-marshal’s baton in his knapsack’.”

equalitarianism. I felt it from the first day I came in contact with the army at the front. "The German officer no longer represents--or at least is conscious of representing--a class or caste. And the men in the ranks feel this. They feel like members of one great family. Even the salute has a new meaning. German privates salute each other, thus making the gesture more of a comradely greeting than the mere recognition of superior rank. In cafés, restaurants, dining-cars, officers and men off duty sit at the same table and converse as men to men. This would have been unthinkable in the last war and is probably unusual in the armies of the West, including our own. In the field, officers and men usually eat from the same soup kitchen."<sup>1</sup>

I do not want to enter into an academic discussion of the distinction between discipline and morale. We all know that discipline depends on the exercise of authority: it has been defined as "the enforced obedience to external authority" and nothing can disguise its bi-polar nature and internal strain. It is sometimes said that if discipline is thoroughly enforced it becomes instinctive, but that is not borne out either by psychological investigations or by military experience. It thus comes about that even while maintaining an undemocratic structure in the army, and an undemocratic structure of society, the present tendency of all governments is to rely on the creation of morale, in the civilian population no less than in the armed forces.

Morale is a group feeling: it is a feeling of cohesion, of unity in the face of danger, and at present it is normally only brought about in conditions of danger, when the group is threatened with extinction. These conditions are brought about, not only by war, but by threats of starvation or subjugation. The morale of a trade union on strike, for example, depends not so much on political consciousness, the ideological struggle for better conditions of work and of life, as on the direct feeling of group solidarity in the face of the insecurity occasioned by the stoppage of work.

<sup>1</sup> William L. Shirer, *Berlin Diary* (London, 1941), pp. 345-6.

What is admirable in the past and desirable for the future is a form of society which succeeds in maintaining morale—as distinct from discipline—under conditions of peace. The feeling of relatedness, of union, which we all experience spontaneously when threatened by invasion, or air raids, or the blockade, should be realized for positive purposes, for the creation of a just society, a natural way of life. There again I think the fascists have seized on an essential psychological truth—and distorted it by using it for their own ends. They realized that a society can only be built up on the principle of association. They therefore had to abolish the existing organizations, because they were pacifist and international—that is to say, essentially diffusionist—and to replace them by new organizations designed to canalize the national spirit. But they realized that this could not be accomplished by coercion. The whole of their educational system, their youth movement, their labour front and their party organization has no other aim but the creation of a spirit stronger than discipline. But the morale thus achieved is not limited to the biological function of group preservation; it is then extended to an ideological function of group expansion, group assertion, group domination. A distortion thus arises from the fact that the spontaneous origin and organic growth of association is thus obliterated, being replaced by an artificial and super-imposed conception of the state, by a new order which is essentially a planned order.

We should always clearly distinguish between the aims and the methods of fascism. The aims are entirely undemocratic, irrational and irresponsible. But some of the methods—by no means all—are more democratic, more psychologically effective, and altogether more successful, than the methods hitherto used by the democracies. Even on the question of leadership it seems to me that the Nazis in particular avoid the psychological crudities which we not only attribute to them, but innocently imitate. It seems to me—and I am mainly relying on what Hitler himself has written in *Mein Kampf*, and on his later speeches and personal behaviour—that in their realization of the supreme importance of morale the Nazis have

adopted a conception of leadership which is radically different from that entertained in our public schools and military forces. The difference is rather a subtle one, but at least we must give Hitler some credit for subtlety.

In his well-known work on *Psychology and Primitive Culture*, Professor Bartlett discusses the relationship of the chief to the primitive group, and points out that—

“it is a relationship in which leadership does not depend mainly upon domination or assertion, but upon a ready susceptibility to the thoughts, feelings and actions of the members of the group. The chief, that is, *expresses* the group rather than *impresses* it. This is a kind of relationship, entirely different, it seems to me, from dominance and assertiveness. . . .”

“A ready susceptibility to the thoughts, feelings and actions of the members of the group”—this phrase might be taken as an apt description of the very quality which Hitler claims to possess.<sup>1</sup> No unprejudiced observer of his career can deny

<sup>1</sup> “Owing to the peculiar circumstances of my life, I am perhaps more capable than anyone else of understanding and realizing the nature and the whole life of the various German castes. Not because I have been able to look down on this life from above but because I have participated in it, because I stood in the midst of this life, because Fate, in a moment of caprice or perhaps fulfilling the designs of Providence, cast me into the great mass of the people, among common folk. Because I myself was a labouring man for years in the building trade and had to earn my own bread. And because for a second time I took my place once again as an ordinary soldier amongst the masses, and because then life raised me into other strata (*Schichten*) of our own people, so that I know these, too, better than countless others who were born in these strata. So Fate has perhaps fitted me more than any other to be the broker—I think I may say the honest broker—for both sides alike” (Speech of 10th May 1933: *op. cit.*, vol. i. p. 862). It is this pose of “honest broker” which distinguishes Hitler from most of the leaders of the past and all those of the present. The democratic leaders (Churchill, Roosevelt) generally come from the upper strata, but if they do come from the same level as Hitler (Ramsay MacDonald, for example) they either make a virtue of their origins or despise them. Hitler is unique, I think, in trying to maintain this pose of “an independent man”.

Hitler a certain representative character—though we must remember that a demagogue will always begin by creating the dissatisfaction which he then sets out to exploit. He earns his easiest honours by alleviating imaginary ills. But it is no ordinary faculty which enables a man to do that. Again let me emphasize that we are concerned with an instrument and not with the use to which it is put. Intuition, to use for the moment the term Hitler himself seems to favour—intuition may be an admirable quality in a rational human being, a beneficent aid to the poet, the scientist and the engineer; but the same quality combined with a sadistic craving for power becomes a destructive force.

I repeat, therefore, that we must not underestimate the *methods*, as opposed to the *motives* of fascism. The motives are the individual lust for power and the racial lust for world domination; but the methods, which include war, persecution, brutality and bestiality of all kinds, also include the establishment of group unity and devotion to a common ideal—features which we assume are essentially democratic. "If", says Hitler towards the end of *Mein Kampf*, "if in its historical development the German people had possessed this group unity as it was enjoyed by other peoples, then the German Reich would to-day probably be mistress of the globe." And he says elsewhere in the same book that with the Aryan the instinct for self-preservation had reached its noblest form "because he willingly subjects his own ego to the life of the community, and, if the hour should require it, he also sacrifices it".

If only, one cannot help thinking, such a feeling for unity and self-sacrifice could have been devoted to something nobler than the conquest of individual power and racial domination. But that is to ignore the reality of the neurosis from which the lust for power springs. The extraordinary success of Hitler is due to the fact that his sado-masochistic impulses, which are explained by his personal history—the frustrated artist, divorced from his own class and rejected by the class he aspired to, the typical isolated, declassed individual in whom the sadistic

neurosis develops most strongly—the extraordinary success of such an individual is due to the fact that his personal neurosis is representative of the collective neurosis of a nation which has also been frustrated in its desire for expansion, its desire for a superior position in the society of nations. In their masochistic longings such a people will eagerly submit to the absolute power of a leader and will only require one liberty in return—the liberty to satisfy the sadistic side of their neurosis by the persecution of some minority, some degraded class. Hence the important part played by anti-semitism in the evolution of German fascism.

I hope I have shown that a dangerous ambiguity lurks in this cry for leadership, this reliance on a popular leader, which characterizes democratic no less than fascist communities in time of war. It is, I believe, not merely a sign of weakness, a sign of war-weariness: it is positively the symptom of a latent state of fascism. If democracy is to maintain its essential difference from fascism, it must not compromise on this question of leadership. Leadership, in the sense of the dominance of the community by a single figure, or a minority, is the acknowledged principle of fascism. What, of course, remains in doubt is whether democracy, as a militant organization, can dispense with this principle. It seems obvious, from the conduct and course of the present war, that it cannot.<sup>1</sup> What we need, we are told every day, is more and better leadership. But what this demand involves is a closer and closer approximation to fascism. The fascists alone have evolved an efficient form of leadership: efficient leadership *is* fascism. Opposed to the principle of leadership there is nothing but the principle of equality. Equality is absolute, too; it is a mathematical term, expressing exact quantities. It does not admit of compromise, and whenever I hear a person tampering with this principle in the name of efficiency, or of ability, then I know I am in the presence of a fascist. You may say if you like that equality is not rational—that since people are not born equal, not equally

<sup>1</sup> It was a presentiment of this fact which drove many genuine democrats in America into the isolationist camp.

endowed by nature,<sup>1</sup> that therefore they do not deserve to live equally. But I do not claim that the principle of equality is a rational doctrine. On the contrary, it is an irrational dogma, a *mystique*. It lays down, precisely because people are born unequal, unequally endowed, they should in the common interest acknowledge a common denominator—a standard of citizenship to which all can aspire, and beyond which none shall venture. I say quite deliberately that unless we are inspired by that mystical or mythical idea of social equality, we can not and we do not believe in the brotherhood of man.

If this dogma is accepted, the practical question remains: how is it given expression in the organization of a modern community? Bernard Shaw, who sees the necessity for this dogma, suggests that it can only be given practical expression in equality of incomes. That, of course, is to remain bound to the concept of economic man, which is inevitable in an old-fashioned Fabian socialist like Shaw. Equality of income might well be the outward expression of equality of status, but in what other, in what more fundamental ways, can equality be expressed?

It is curious that we should have to search for an answer to this question, because in spite of economic and social inequalities we in England have in theory and to some extent in practice enjoyed what we call "equality before the law". Laws might be unjust, and the expression of social prejudices rather than of natural equity; nevertheless, for centuries a fair attempt has been made to administer them equally to all

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold, on the other hand, argues that the love of equality is a natural expression of the instinct of expansion. "A thousand arguments may be discovered in favour of inequality, just as a thousand arguments may be discovered in favour of absolutism. And the one insuperable objection to inequality is the same as the one insuperable objection to absolutism: namely, that inequality, like absolutism, thwarts a vital instinct, and being thus against nature, is against our humanization." But a further remark shows that his argument is essentially the same as the one used above: "On the one side, in fact, inequality harms by pampering; on the other, by vulgarizing and depressing. A system founded on it is against nature, and in the long run breaks down."—*Mixed Essays* (1879).

men.<sup>1</sup> In fact, you cannot divorce the idea of law from the idea of equity, and that is such a commonplace—such a logical conception, as some might say; such a tradition, as others might say—that we fail to appreciate the fact that it is by no means an inevitable state of affairs. Already under fascism we see a contrary conception of law emerging—one law for the Germans and another law for the races they have subjugated; one law for Aryans and another law for Jews. More recently Hitler has secured the formal abrogation of legal procedure in Germany, and has made his personal will superior to the idea of equity. The social hierarchy which we accept almost as a natural order is just as unnatural and illogical as one law for the rich and another for the poor, or as one law for the Germans and another for the conquered Poles. There is no *natural* aristocracy—though there can be an unnaturally cultivated aristocracy, a pedigree stock of human beings no less than a pedigree stock of cattle. The upper classes and the middle classes, the upper middle and the lower middle and the working classes—none of these is a class ordained by nature—they are all expressions of economic inequalities, inequalities which have sometimes lasted for generations. They are continually disturbed, not only by shifting fortunes, but by that displacement which sociologists call the circulation of élites, a process which merely expresses the biological fact that luxury and laziness will in the end debilitate the class which enjoys them, and that this class will sink and its place be taken by a class which has led a healthier life. But the circulation of élites—an idea very popular with fascist philosophers—is also not a natural phenomenon. At least, it is no more “natural” than the circulation of water in a boiling kettle: it is an expression of inequalities in social life—inequalities of work and nourishment and recreation. Equalize the temperature of water and it no longer circulates;

<sup>1</sup> In so far as they are administered! I am well aware that some people cannot afford “to go to law”, but this injustice is economic and not legal. It should also be clear that I am referring to law as administered in Great Britain, and not to the administration of law in, for example, India.



equalize social conditions, let everybody lead a healthy life, and then you will no longer get a circulation of élites.

And there the fascist philosopher—and some philosophers who call themselves democrats—think they have got you. Ah, they say, no circulation—that means stagnation! And stagnation means decay! War is justified by such people solely on these grounds—that it prevents social stagnation and encourages the emergence of vital stock. A convincing rhetorical attitude can be struck if the circulation metaphor is maintained. But it is merely a figure of speech, a myth. Why all this bubble bubble, toil and trouble? Does not nature offer us alternative metaphors of balance and symmetry, of poise and repose? The best fruit grows on the sheltered wall. The deepest waters are still. To a mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders. How easy it is to find, or invent, convincing metaphors of exactly the opposite tenor. Chinese philosophy is full of them. The universe is full of them. I know that the scientist can present a frightful picture of disintegrating worlds, of exploding suns and cooling planets, of nature red in tooth and claw. But the most fundamental discoveries of science are discoveries of significant design: the periodicity of the elements, the structure of molecules, the universal laws underlying organic forms,—these are facts which any reasonable man will make the basis of a positive philosophy.

Lao Tsū, the Great Chinese sage, formulated three rules of political wisdom, which required: (1) abstention from aggressive war and capital punishment, (2) absolute simplicity of living, and (3) refusal to assert active authority. These three rules express the true meaning of social equality. They imply that no man has the right to assert his authority over another man, and that likewise no nation has the right to assert its authority over another nation. If no such right is exercised, by individuals or by nations, then a state of political equality can exist. As for the second rule, which enjoins simple living, that too is not remote from the concept of equality. For the economic complexity of the modern world, involving economic hierarchies and inequalities of income, involving an economic

conception of man himself—living man reduced to a commodity, like frozen mutton—this is entirely due to the feverish lust for luxuries. The rule does not deny us plenty: only he that is frugal is truly able to be profuse, says Lao Tsū. Indeed, unless there is plenty, equality can only be maintained by authority; and since we renounce authority, we should ensure plenty. Trotsky once expressed the whole truth in a vivid way: If there is a scarcity of goods in the shops, people will form queues; and if there are queues in the streets, you will have to have police to keep them in order. Law, we might say, is an expression of want.

But it is time I began to draw these observations to some conclusion. I have been questioning the cult of leadership: I assert that it is a denial of the principle of equality. As a counterpart to this cult of leadership we find a state of social irresponsibility, to which I might have devoted more space. But the symptoms of submissiveness, of lethargy and apathy, need no description. I would like to point out, however, that they are not confined to the politically ignorant—I know of no more disastrous example of irresponsibility than the behaviour of the trade unions during the past thirty years. Not only have they repeatedly failed to achieve international unity among the workers of the world: they have been afraid to assume the responsibilities within their grasp at home. I have myself heard one of the leading trade union officials from Transport House declare that the unions had not the necessary managerial ability to control their own industries, and that therefore their policy must be one of compromise and joint control with the employers. That is one instance of what I mean by irresponsibility, and perhaps it deserves a stronger word.

Collective responsibility is the alternative to leadership, and the counterpart of equality. If each individual in the social body is a responsible member of that body there is no need for external control. The body acts as an organic whole, and acts spontaneously. The members of the body-politic are, of course,

differentiated according to their function: one is a farmer and another an engineer, one a nurse and another a doctor; and among these members are some whose function is to co-ordinate others. These are the organizers, the administrators and the managers who are essential to a complicated industrial society; but I see no reason why the co-ordinator should be more highly placed or more highly paid than the originator, the creator, the worker. The manager owes his present status and prestige, not to the nature of his work, but to his immediate control of the instruments of production. In any natural society he would be as unobtrusive as a railway signalman in his box.<sup>1</sup>

I personally believe that life should be immensely simplified—that much of the complexity of modern society is merely the final complication of the sickness we call civilization. But even our elaborate society can be a functional society, and I see no reason why all functions, which are equally necessary to the health of society, should not have social equality. That, at any rate, is the proper meaning of communism, and in this sense communism, the communism of Kropotkin and not that of Marx, is the only alternative to fascism.

Granted all this, my critics will ask: how will you carry on? Somebody must formulate plans, decide on policy, make decisions on behalf of the whole community. I agree, and would now like to recall the distinction between two kinds of leadership made by Professor Bartlett, which I quoted earlier in this essay; between the kind of leader who *impresses* the group by asserting his authority, and the kind who *expresses* the group by being susceptible to their thoughts, feelings and desires. It is this second kind of leader, and only this kind of leader, who has a place in a community of free people. And who is the leader who expresses the thoughts, feelings and desires of the people—who but the poet and artist? That is

<sup>1</sup> The pretensions of this group to form a new governing class, so ably analysed by James Burnham in *The Managerial Revolution* (London, 1942), are an inevitable consequence of the cult of leadership in a machine civilization.

the conclusion I have been leading up to. It is not a new idea -- it is the conclusion that Plato came to, and that Shelley revived in this country: the idea that it is the man of imagination, the poet and philosopher above all, but equally the man who can present ideas in the visual images of painting and sculpture or through the still more effective medium of drama -- the idea that it is this individual whom society should accept as its only leader. Not, of course, at his own valuation. Plato pointed out certain dangers that were to be avoided at all costs. For there are good artists and bad artists, and bad artists are almost more dangerous than bad politicians. Any fruitful analysis of Hitler, for example, must begin with the bad artist rather than the ambitious politician. A free people must therefore be a highly critical people. Such a people does not exist at present, in this or any other country, and it can only be brought into existence by an education and an environment which places first things first--which discounts power and money and competition and all the evil distortions they cause in our social structure and educational ideals.

The evil which is among us, woven into the substance of our life, making us unworthy of equality and incapable of achieving a true democracy, is the evil of assertiveness--the assertiveness of the father, the assertiveness of the teacher, the assertiveness of the foreman and the boss, of the capitalist and the statesman. But it is the assertiveness exercised on the child which is the main evil, for this destroys the unfolding sensibility on which taste and judgment should rest, and plants in its stead the seeds of sadism and masochism. Consider only the assertiveness of the teacher, who significantly claims the title of *master*. He is the first model for the bully, and the early inspiration of the tyrant. It is he who passes on his creed of leadership to the captain of the team and the head of the class: it is he who poisons innocent minds with pride and ambition. How can we expect a libertarian society when our educational system is throughout organized on essentially authoritarian principles? Let us introduce equality into our schools, ask our teachers to be guides and comrades rather than masters and headmasters,

and then we shall at least lay the foundations of a community organically free.

“No trace of slavery ought to mix with the studies of a free-born man.” Those words of Plato should be carved above the doors of all our schools and universities, for they express the only condition on which a community of free men can be founded.

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## Culture and Liberty

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*You can never get me to regard freedom as synonymous with political liberty. What you call freedom, I call freedoms; and what I call the struggle for freedom is nothing but the constant, living assimilation of the idea of freedom. Who possesses freedom otherwise than as something to be striven for possesses it only as a thing without life or spirit, for the idea of freedom has always this quality, that it constantly expands as one assimilates it, so that if during the struggle one pauses to say: Now I have it! he merely shows that he has lost it. But to have just this dead kind—a certain static view of freedom—is characteristic of state organizations; and it is just this that I have called worthless.*

IBSEN, *Letter to George Brandes*, 1871.

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THE connection between culture and liberty is not rhetorical, as Plato's words, quoted at the end of the last essay, might suggest, but vital and organic. That is the general conclusion I shall try to establish in the present essay, but before reaching it I must show, first, what meaning I attach to the word culture; secondly, how culture is related to the kind of society we live in, or intend to live in—and that will involve a definition of liberty; and, thirdly, why culture is incompatible with the kind of society which has been set up by the totalitarian states.

What do we mean by this word *culture*? That is rather an embarrassing question for the Englishman. He is not very conscious of his culture, and rather despises people who are. It will be remembered that in the last war a good deal of insular propaganda centred round the German word "*Kultur*". We English felt, not merely that it was ridiculous to spell the word

with a "K", but that Kultur with a "K" was altogether phoney. And in a sense I think we are right to be suspicious of all this talk about culture, and in the next essay in this volume I shall do my best to dispose of it. For the odd thing about culture is, that the world is not generally conscious of it until it is dead. We can talk about the culture of Greece or Rome, of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance; in each case there are visible traces of it which have survived the test of time. But to talk about the culture of the British Empire, for example, that doesn't seem possible; nor, even if we spell the word with an English "C", does it seem possible for us to talk about the culture of modern Germany.

Culture is, in fact, a slow product of the organic process we call history, and it is very difficult to catch it on the move. For example, contemporary efforts to estimate the greatness of poets and painters are almost invariably wrong. And if occasionally an age does honour the right man, it generally does so for the wrong reason. In our dumb instinctive way I think we as a nation have always realized these truths, and for that reason we have not tried to define the nature of our culture. I discovered this in a very practical way when some time ago I undertook to compile an anthology which would express, through the words of our own great poets, philosophers and statesmen, the quality of English culture, of the English attitude to life.<sup>1</sup> Though it was comparatively easy to find passages in which our writers had praised the English landscape, and even described the characters of English men, and though the historical mission of England has often been defined, there is surprisingly little that shows any consciousness of our native genius as it is expressed in our literature and drama, our painting and music. By comparison, the literatures of Germany and of France abound in such self-examinations, self-criticisms and self-satisfaction.

I am not going to make the mistake of confusing culture with what, in a narrower sense, we call the arts. Culture is something wider than art—and something more intangible.

<sup>1</sup> *The English Vision* (Routledge, 1939).

When you have examined all the architecture and drama, the oratory and philosophy, the poetry, painting and music of a nation, even then you have not exhausted the meaning of the word. To be worthy of the word a nation has to possess something more—something in its manners, something in its speech and behaviour—something which we might call gentleness, grace or reverence. And this intangible quality may be precisely the essential quality—the one thing which being given to a nation, all others are added. It is precisely this quality which is lacking, and always has been lacking, in the culture of Germany.

For German poetry, for German philosophy, for some periods of German architecture, I personally have the greatest admiration, and though I won't go so far as the late Lord Haldane and describe Germany as my spiritual home, I do not hesitate to confess that I feel for German culture a sympathy which is deep and genuine. But at the same time this feeling of sympathy has always been accompanied by a feeling of despair. It is as though every road taken by German poets and philosophers led to the edge of an abyss—an abyss from which they could not withdraw, but into which they must fall headlong—the abyss which is the second part of Faust, or the transcendentalism of Kant, or the dialectic of Hegel—the abysses of intellect no longer controlled by any awareness of the sensuous realities of life. Now these faults are not unknown to the Germans themselves, and some of their greatest writers, Goethe and Nietzsche, for example, have indulged in orgies of national self-castigation. But let me quote a less well-known self-criticism—the words of a very great poet, perhaps the greatest of all German poets, and one whom the Nazis have sometimes perverted to their nationalistic purposes: Friedrich Hölderlin. This is what he said about his fellow-countrymen in his *Hyperion*:<sup>1</sup>

“It is a hard word, and yet I say it because it is the truth:  
I can think of no people more divided and torn than the

<sup>1</sup> *Sämliche Werke*, ed. Hellingrath, vol. ii. pp. 282-6; trans. R. Peacock, *Hölderlin* (London, 1958), p. 129.



Germans. You see artisans, but not human beings; thinkers, but not human beings; priests, but not human beings; masters and servants, old and young people, but not human beings. . . . But your Germans like to stick to the most material and necessary tasks, and that is why there is amongst them so much bungling, and so little really free and joyful activity. But even that could be overlooked, if only such men were not so insensitive to all beautiful life, if only the curse of god-forsaken, unnatural life did not rest everywhere on such a people. . . . Everything on earth is so imperfect, the Germans are ever complaining. If only someone would tell this god-forsaken people that things are so imperfect amongst them only because they do not leave purity uncorrupted and sacred things untouched by their coarse hands; that nothing flourishes amongst them because they do not heed the roots of growth, divine nature; that amongst them life is empty and burdensome and too full of cold, mute conflict, because they scorn the spirit, which infuses vigour and nobility into human activity and serenity into suffering, and brings into cities and dwellings love and brotherhood."

Hölderlin here makes an important point: the point that culture is not an affair of crude calculation, or power and purpose, but of the spirit, of what Hölderlin, writing in German, calls *Genius*. And this is the essence which, somehow or other, we have to preserve within the structure of our society.

Now, what has been proved many times in the past, and what is being proved to-day in Germany, is that this spirit can only exist in an atmosphere of liberty. And by liberty we mean not economic security, which is the only conception of liberty entertained by Hitler, but something much more in the nature of intellectual adventure. This becomes clear if we examine what might be called the incidence of culture, for then the vital difference between the true and the false conception of culture is seen to be a difference of position. I mean that you can regard culture either as something originating in separate individuals, or as something deriving from the collective entity

of the nation. This is a very important distinction, and Hitler himself is quite aware of it. When on 18th July 1937 he opened the magnificent new *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* in Munich, he made a speech of one and a half hours entirely devoted to these questions of art and culture. I think he has the distinction of being the first ruler of a modern nation to speak at such a length on such a highbrow subject. During the course of this speech Hitler made quite clear the very close connection which exists between the political and artistic concepts of National Socialism. Art, for Hitler, is not a grace or ornament of civilization; it is the very test and proof of nationhood. *Art has its roots in the nation*: that is the dogma which he reiterates in this speech and to which all his arguments lend support. But equally there is the assumption that a nation only flourishes—puts forth its flowers and its fruits—in its art. As a nation grows to self-awareness and to power, so there comes into being an art which is of that nation, peculiar to that nation, a direct expression of its being and ethos. Hitler is full of contempt for art which claims to be of an age rather than of a race, to be contemporary and international.

“The artist has to set up a monument not so much to an age, but to his people. For time is subject to change, the years come and go. That which would only live as the product of a certain age would have to be transitory like the age itself. . . . But we National Socialists recognize only one transitoriness, and that is the transitoriness of the nation itself. . . . As long as a nation exists, it constitutes a stable pole in the whirling flight of time. It is the one enduring element. And thus art, as the expression of this stable quality, is an eternal monument, itself stable and enduring: having thus no standard of yesterday and to-day, modern and not-modern, but only the standard of ‘valueless’ or ‘valuable’, and so of ‘eternal’ or ‘transitory’. And this eternity is enshrined in the life of the nations, as long as these themselves are eternal, that is, endure.”

For these reasons Hitler has enforced a national standard of

art and has created a whole organization to see that this standard is adopted and observed by all artists, architects, writers and composers within the Reich.<sup>1</sup> And with the help of the Gestapo, that standard has been the only standard in evidence since 1933.

The result has been disastrous. It is true that we have not lately had much opportunity to become personally acquainted with the new national architecture, national painting and national poetry of Germany; but of one thing we can already be certain: it is not made for export. We have seen photographs of the new architecture, and of some of the new works of painting and sculpture. We have read some of the new poetry and drama. In so far as it is not crude propaganda, all this work, in every department of art, is of a dullness and deadness not exceeded by our own Royal Academy. It is not merely the expression of empty life, of cold, mute conflict: when not barbarous, it is vulgar and sentimental, and never once lifts itself into those regions of serenity and joy to which all true works of art belong.

<sup>1</sup> Translations of representative passages from Hitler's speeches on "Kultur" are given by Professor Baynes in Section 21 of *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler* (Oxford, 1942), vol. i, pp. 566-615. It has to be admitted that Hitler shows in these speeches a far profounder appreciation of the significance of art in national life than any other political leader of our time; but the truths which he is compelled to recognize are perverted by racial prejudice and by moral or political intolerance. "One anxious wish and one alone must therefore fill the hearts of us all—that Providence may grant us the great masters who shall echo in music the emotions of our soul, who shall immortalize them in stone. We know that here more than elsewhere the bitter saying is proved true: many think themselves called to be, but few are chosen. But since we are convinced that in the sphere of politics we have truly expressed the character and the vital will of our people, we believe also in our capacity to recognize and thus to find the corresponding cultural complement. We shall discover and encourage the artists who are able to impress upon the State of the German people the cultural stamp of the Germanic race which will be valid for all time." (*Op. cit.*, pp. 575-6.) It is the fallacy, which I deal with in another essay in this volume, of assuming that culture is something which can be stamped on the people by means of a steel-punch operated by the state-machine.

Such is the kind of culture that we may expect in a country which subordinates the artist and writer to political censorship and police control. Now the Germans, and the Italians, and the Russians, to whom the same criticism applies, are not unaware of these deficiencies, and the only excuses they can offer are to the effect that a culture is not built in a day, that we must wait for the older and obstinate generation of artists to die off, and that for the moment the state is fully occupied in building up its economic and military strength. Art, according to the Nazi theory, is a sort of reward for national self-sufficiency, and it will blossom when that state of self-sufficiency is securely established. Hitler is welcome to this delusive hope; but his theory ignores the truth of the matter, which is far more subtle. All forms of art, and indeed all expressions of human genius, are the products of exceptionally endowed individuals, and though those products may to a considerable extent depend on the kind of society to which these individuals belong, their actual creation is the result of a very delicate psychological balance of forces within the individual mind. Anyone who has studied this profoundly interesting problem of artistic expression, knows that it is one of the most unaccountable phenomena in the whole field of science, and that no means have yet been devised either of inducing creative forces in the normal mind, or of controlling their operation in the mind of the artist. The creative spirit bloweth where it listeth; that is to say, it obeys laws which are beyond our present understanding. Nothing can explain why a particular individual, born in a casual place like Stratford-on-Avon and brought up in an absolutely casual manner, should have been endowed with the supreme poetic power of Shakespeare. Nothing can explain the erratic phenomena of art except laws of chance and probability which are beyond calculation. But if we are so ignorant of the positive laws of artistic expression, we do know, on the negative side, that no force is so easily inhibited. It is not merely that the act of expression—the particular inspiration which gives birth to a work of art—is subject to frustration by the least interruption and dispersal of the mood of concentration;

but the whole artistic life of the artist can be brought to a sudden end by casual and apparently irrelevant causes—by marriage, by age, by change of climate or even by change of diet. But devastating as these interruptions are, they are as nothing compared with any form of external control affecting the mode and quality of expression. You may put a poet in prison and he will still write: like John Bunyan, he may write all the better in seclusion and enforced solitude. But if you tell him what to write and how to write, either he will not be able to write another word, or he will produce a Coronation Ode or an Ode to Lenin which can only be described as a monument of dullness.

That, surely, is obvious to all but the kind of thug or philistine who rules in Russia or Germany, but let us give the thug his due. The Nazis at any rate acknowledge the importance of art, which is more than any British Government has ever done. Fatal as their interference with art has been, do not let us go away with the complacent idea that our policy of *laissez-faire* is the alternative. As in economics, so in art: *laissez-faire* within a capitalist economy merely abandons art to the chances of unrestricted competition and the devil take the hindmost. It means that art becomes one more commodity on the free market, and that to succeed it must practise all the wiles of salesmanship—mass appeal, sex appeal, adulteration, and the sacrifice of quality to cheapness. That, in short, is what is wrong with our culture. It has become part of our stock-in-trade. Indeed, what little recognition has been given to contemporary art in this country has usually been under the auspices of the Board of Trade.

The commercialization of art has been accomplished in the past 150 years. Before that time art existed for the most part on *patronage*, and though we do not nowadays like the sound of the word, it is to some form of patronage that art must return if it is ever to recover its vitality.<sup>1</sup> But this brings us up against a very real dilemma. It is impossible—and will become still more impossible in the socialist state of the future

—to depend on *personal* patronage. The alternative is obvious, it will be said—*state* patronage. But how are we to visualize state patronage—how is such state patronage going to differ essentially from the state control of art exercised by Hitler's régime? You may have a democratically elected Minister of Fine Arts instead of a commissar appointed by the dictator; but how exactly is this Minister to set about his job? Is there going to be a Labour policy for the Fine Arts and a Conservative policy for the Fine Arts, a government policy and an opposition policy? And what exactly is a policy for the Fine Arts? You may, of course, reform the art schools and commission artists to paint murals for all government buildings; you may imitate the Federal Art Project of the U.S.A., which has at least preserved American artists from starvation. But all this, although it may create a lot of cultural activity, will not necessarily create a culture. I confess I do not see any vital connection between culture and collectivism. I do not see how the cold monster of the state can replace the sympathetic patron, how a heterogeneous committee can ever be a substitute for the man of taste and sensibility. Not that all patrons in the past were enlightened: some of them were as prejudiced and tyrannical as a Hitler. The only substitute for patronage I can suggest involves some form of guild organization, in which the artists, in each branch of the arts, are so organized that they are able to support themselves by exchanging their products for the products of other organized producers. But this implies a form of guild socialism such as I have outlined in the first essay in this volume.

And here let me explain that when I speak of guild socialism, or on other occasions of anarchism or syndicalism, I always have in mind this very problem of culture and liberty, which is for me the ugliest snag in the way of any system of state socialism. It is not merely that I cannot see how the sensuous and spiritual truths of culture can be safely delivered into the hands of ministries and committees; it is not merely that I distrust the calculating minds of economists and politicians; but everywhere I look, whether into past history or at present practice, I see

the hand of the state as a dead hand, a hand which paralyses every manifestation of the human spirit, not only all forms of art, but even philosophy and religion. What is national socialism but a state philosophy or a state religion? If we are going to oppose national socialism in the fundamentals of its faith, then we must first and foremost deny this worship of the nation and the state. When Hitler says that the only reality is the nation, we must say No: the only reality is the human being. When Hitler says that art is a direct expression of the being and ethos of the nation, we must say No: art is a direct expression of the emotion and vision of the individual—of one man speaking to his neighbours and for his neighbours, of one man speaking to and for the whole of humanity. But we cannot logically say such things if in the same breath we deny the individual by advocating a form of socialism which, in the pursuit of economic or political ideals, establishes a bureaucracy to which all the ways of life are subordinated. I realize that there is no short cut to that ideal of social freedom which we all desire. But this past quarter of a century through which we have lived has one bitter lesson for all of us. In one country after another we have seen the revolutionary fervour which is the basis of our socialism perverted with apparent ease into an instrument of oppression. Before Stalin there was Lenin, and before Lenin there was Marx; before Mussolini there was Labriola and before Labriola there was Marx; before Hitler there was Noske and before Noske there was Marx. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Marxian socialism leads inevitably to nationalism. Remember that the component elements of the contraction "Nazi" are "nationalism" and "socialism". All fascist movements represent a nationalistic perversion of the original doctrines of socialism. Let us therefore take care that we, too, do not pervert the true doctrines of liberty and equality, and find too late that we have created a machine whose power we can no longer control—a machine which will carry us, helpless passengers, into the realm of totalitarian despotism.

I have been carried away from my immediate subject, which

was the danger of state patronage. But perhaps I have made it evident with what distrust we must treat the prospects of art and culture under any form of state socialism. I fail to draw, in this respect, any real distinction between state socialism and national socialism, and I suggest that whatever we call it, any form of totalitarian collectivism is fatal to culture, simply because it cannot leave culture alone, but must pervert it into an instrument of power. What, then, is the alternative?

There is one other possibility. It is to abolish the artist—I mean, abolish the artist as an economic unit, as a separate profession. Art would then be produced, as it generally is to-day, by people who earn their living in some other way. The only duty of the community would be to see that everyone who wanted it had sufficient liberty to practise an art—and I mean liberty in the concrete sense of free time. It does not seem to me that this is an impossible ideal to aim at, but it is a general social ideal and not one which can be realized on behalf of art alone. It should be obvious that by the time we had reached such a degree of social development, certain types of artist would have been absorbed into the general organization of the life of the community. The architect, the sculptor, and even the painter would be no longer artists, but artisans, and as such organic units in the building guild; the composer and the dramatist would be artisans in the theatre guild. In fact, about the only social misfit would be the poet, and except for poets laureate and political propagandists like Virgil and Pope, they have always been left out in the cold.

When I say that we should abolish the artist, what I really mean is that we should all become artists. It is this horrible distinction between art and ordinary things, between artists and ordinary men, which is the mark or symptom of the disease of our civilization. When we have put that civilization to rights, we shall be less conscious of our culture but we shall have more of it.

As I present it, this idea may have the appearance of a paradox, but it is not original. It was the conclusion reached by that great artist and great socialist, William Morris: a man who



thought deeply on this very problem of culture and liberty. Morris perhaps tended to simplify the problem, both in his reading of the past and his vision of the future. But one thing he saw clearly: that in the society of the future the divisions between the artist and the artisan which is so characteristic of our present civilization had to disappear: culture, as he would say, had to become identical with the pleasure of life. All through Morris's work runs the essential thought, that if you establish the right form of society, culture will be added to it, as naturally as the colour to the rose. And as for the right form of society, let me describe it in Morris's own words:

"It is a society which does not know the meaning of the words rich and poor, or the rights of property, or law or legality, or nationality: a society which has no consciousness of being governed; in which equality of condition is a matter of course, and in which no man is rewarded for having served the community by having the power given him to injure it."<sup>1</sup>

It is possible that I ought at this point to say more about bringing culture to the people, but it seems to me that it is useless to bring culture to people who have not been prepared for it. In other words, we have to bring the people to culture. To do this we have to begin at the bottom and build up. Any extensive change in the cultural level of the nation can only be brought about by a long process of education which will in itself be an essential part of our social revolution. And by a long process of education I do not mean university extension lectures on the painters of the Renaissance, or exhibitions of modern art in places like Poplar and Pontypridd. I do not mean cultural education of any kind: again I say, make your social revolution and let culture take care of itself. What I do mean is nothing less than a drastic reform of the whole technique of education. We do not, at present, educate children to use their senses: we teach them as quickly as possible to master abstract symbols and the processes of conceptual thought,

<sup>1</sup> From a lecture on "The Society of the Future", reprinted in *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, by May Morris, vol. ii. p. 466.

and by the age of eleven or twelve we have produced a thinking-machine of sorts—a machine which will, in the course of time, take its place in the counting-house and be able to absorb daily potion of newspaper dope. But this machine has lost the faculties it had whilst still an unspoilt child: it has lost its instinctive sense of rhythm and harmony, its vivid imagination and spontaneous delight. Education has killed one half of its nature—the half which otherwise would naturally appreciate beauty in all its manifestations. This is perhaps the essential problem, for what is the meaning of culture to people who are mentally blind and deaf; and what is the use of liberty to people whose sensuous faculties are stiff with confinement, wasted for want of exercise?

Though the workers of the world may lose their chains, what will their new liberty benefit them if they find they cannot any longer move their limbs like free men? The only freedom that matters is the freedom to dance—the freedom to escape from the routine and necessary steps of our economic activities, and to take the air like gods. The spirit which infuses vigour and nobility into human activity and serenity into suffering, which brings love and brotherhood into our cities and dwellings, is the spirit of liberty, and it is its presence among us which is the only evidence of true culture.

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## To Hell with Culture

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*When will revolutionary leaders realize that "culture" is dope, a worse dope than religion; for even if it were true that religion is the opiate of the people, it is worse to poison yourself than to be poisoned, and suicide is more dishonourable than murder. To hell with culture, culture as a thing added like a sauce to otherwise unpalatable stale fish!*

ERIC GILL.

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HAVING, in the last essay, defined the conditions under which a true culture may be expected to emerge, let us now dispose of a certain legacy of that commodity which is all that our starved civilization has to live on at present. What is this culture which students and professors, Bolsheviks and Nazis, the W.E.A. and the Y.M.C.A., all so eagerly strive to possess? The cultured Greeks, it seems, hadn't a word for it. They had good architects, good sculptors, good poets, just as they had good craftsmen and good statesmen. They knew that their way of life was a good way of life, and they were willing if necessary to fight to defend it. But it would never have occurred to them that they had a separate commodity, culture—something to be given a trade-mark by their academicians, something to be acquired by superior people with sufficient time and money, something to be exported to foreign countries along with figs and olives. It wasn't even an invisible export: it was something natural if it existed at all—something of which they were unconscious, something as instinctive as their language or the complexion of their skins. It could not even be described as a by-product of their way of life: it was that way of life itself.

It was the Romans, the first large-scale capitalists in Europe,

who turned culture into a commodity. They began by importing culture—Greek culture—and then they grew autarkic and produced their own brand. As they extended their empire, they dumped their culture on the conquered nations. Roman architecture, Roman literature, Roman manners—these set a standard to which all newly civilized people aspired. When a Roman poet like Ovid talks about a cultured man, there is already the sense of something polished, refined, a veneer on the surface of an otherwise rough humanity. It would not have occurred to a refined Roman of this sort that the craftsmen of his time had any contribution to make to the finer values of life. Nor had they—Roman pottery, for example, may be cultured, but it is dull and degraded.

Culture, we are told, went underground in the Dark Ages, and it was a long time before it came to the surface again. The next epoch, known as the Middle Ages, is rivalled only by the Greek Age; but, oddly enough, it too was not conscious of its culture. Its architects were foremen builders, its sculptors were masons, its illuminators and painters were clerks. They had no word for art in the sense of our "fine arts": art was all that was pleasing to the sight: a cathedral, a candlestick, a chessman, a cheese-press.

But the Middle Ages came to an end, and with them the guild system and the making of things for use. Certain clever people began to grab things—church property, common land, minerals, especially gold. They began to make things in order to acquire more than they could use, a surplus which they could convert into gold; and because they couldn't eat gold, or build houses with it, they lent it to other people who were in need of it and charged them rent or interest. And thus the capitalist system came into existence, and with it the thing we call "culture".

The first recorded use of the word in its modern sense is 1510, just when capitalism began to get going. It is the time of the Revival of Learning and the Renaissance, and those two movements signify the very essence of culture for all educated people, even unto the present day. But it was not until the beginning

of the nineteenth century, the period of the Industrial Revolution, that culture became finally divorced from work. So long as people made things by hand, certain traditional ways of making them persisted, and were good. It was only when things began to be made by machines that the traditions inherent, as it were, in the minds and muscles of the handworker, finally disappeared.

To take the place of this instinctive tradition, the industrialists introduced certain new standards. They might be merely standards of utility and cheapness—that is to say, of profitableness; but since sensitive people were not satisfied with these, the manufacturers began to look back into the past, to collect and imitate the good things which had been made by their ancestors. If you knew all about the things of the past, you were recognized as a man of taste, and the sum of the nation's "tastes" was its "culture". Matthew Arnold, in fact, defined culture as "the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world". And with Matthew Arnold, the Prince Consort and the Great Exhibition we reach the peak point of the English cult of culture. After the 'sixties its self-consciousness became too obvious, and we entered a period of decadence—Pre-Raphaelitism, the Yellow Book, Oscar Wilde, and all that—until the First World War came and gave a final push to the whole rotten fabric.

For the last quarter of a century we have been trying to pick up the pieces: we have had lectures and exhibitions, museums and art galleries, adult education and cheap books, and even an International Committee for Intellectual Co-operation sponsored by the League of Nations. But it was all a beating on a hollow drum, and a Second World War has brought us up finally against the realities of this question as of so many others.

To hell with culture! Gill's curse finds an unexpected echo in *Schlageter*, a play by Hanns Johst, the most popular Nazi dramatist in Germany. There one of his characters, the mouthpiece of the most violent Nazi doctrines, exclaims:

"When I hear the word culture, I release the safety-catch on my Browning." The Nazis also hate the sauce on the stale fish, and they prepare to change it—but to change the sauce, not the fish! They complain that the sauce they have been served with is Jewish, or Catholic, at any rate International, and what they want is an *echt* German sauce. So they go back to Wotan and the Nibelungs, to the mythology which Wagner exhumed from their misty past, and they mix it with mysticism and sentimentality and think they have got hold of the elements of a new culture. And a "culture" indeed it is, and being rather simple-minded and slow-witted behind their bombers and brass-bands, they are satisfied. They have found a culture to match their agriculture and industry, an autarkic culture made for home-consumption and not for export. We need neither envy them nor imitate them. It is "culture" anyhow, and when we say with Eric Gill "To hell with culture", we mean to hell with all forms of culture, ancient or modern, genuine or *ersatz*.

It is not that, Nazi-like, I want to burn a heap of books or knock down a lot of ancient monuments. All these things—the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome, medieval cathedrals and Chippendale furniture, the works of St. Thomas Aquinas and Mr. Charles Morgan, shall be preserved for those who can make any use of them; but they shall not be unduly revered or made subjects for university degrees. A knowledge of them will no longer be a social certificate of taste and refinement. Those qualities, which will still exist (more than ever, we hope), will belong to the things we make, and to the people who make them. And the people who make the most efficient and the most pleasing things will be the people we shall honour as artists.

A democratic culture—that is not the same thing as a *democracy plus culture*. The first important point that I must make, and keep on stressing, is that culture in a natural society will not be a separate and distinguishable thing—a body of learning that can be put into books and museums and mugged up in your spare time. Just because it will not exist as a separate

entity, we had better stop using the word "culture". We shall not need it in the future and it will only confuse the present issue. Culture belongs to the past: the future will not be conscious of its culture.

Let us now get down to details. The values which I am concerned with in this essay—values which we call "the beautiful"—were not invented in ancient Athens or anywhere else. They are part of the structure of the universe and of our consciousness of that structure. To argue this point fully would carry us too far into the obscure regions of philosophy, and I have written enough about it in my more technical books. But what I mean, in simple language, is that we should not be pleased with the way certain things look unless our physical organs and the senses which control them were so constituted as to be pleased with certain definite proportions, relations, rhythms, harmonies, and so on. When we say, for example, that two colours "clash", we are not expressing a personal opinion: there is a definite scientific reason for the disagreeable impression they create, and it could no doubt be expressed in a mathematical formula. Again, when a printer, unhampered by the economy standards which are for the time being imposed on him, decides to impose the type on a page so as to leave margins of a definite proportion, he is trusting to his eye, which tells him by its muscular tensions that this particular arrangement is easeful. These are very elementary examples, and when large paintings or poems or musical compositions are in question, the whole business is infinitely more complicated. But, in general, we see that certain proportions in nature (in crystals, plants, the human figure, etc.) are "right", and we carry over these proportions into the things we make—not deliberately, but instinctively.

For our present purposes that is all we need to know of the dreary science of aesthetics. There is an order in Nature and the order of Society should be a reflection of it, not only in our way of living, but also in our way of doing and making. If we follow this natural order in all the ways of our life, we shall not

need to talk about culture. We shall have it without being conscious of it.

But how are we to attain the natural order of making things, which is my particular concern in this essay?

Obviously, we can't make things naturally in unnatural surroundings. We can't do things properly unless we are properly fed and properly housed. We must also be properly equipped with the necessary tools, and then left alone to get on with the job.

In other words, before we can make things naturally, we must establish the natural order in society, which for my present purposes I assume is what we all mean by a democracy. But it is useless to talk about a democratic art or a democratic literature until we are in fact a democracy. And we are a long way off that.

Seventy years ago Walt Whitman wrote in his *Democratic Vistas*:

"We have frequently printed the word Democracy. Yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawakened, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen and tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted."

Democracy is still a great word, and in spite of many wordy prophets who have used it since Whitman's time, its gist still sleeps, its history is still unenacted. Nothing is more absurd, among all the political absurdities committed by fascists and Nazis, than their assumption that democracy is a system that has been tried and has failed. Democracy has been promulgated and its principles endlessly proclaimed; but in no country in the world has it ever, for more than the brief space of a few months, been put into practice. For democracy requires three conditions for its fulfilment, and until all three conditions are satisfied, it cannot be said to exist. It is only necessary to state these conditions to show that democracy never has existed in modern times:



The first condition of democracy is that *all production should be for use, and not for profit.*

The second condition is that *each should give according to his ability, and each receive according to his needs.*

The third condition is that *the workers in each industry should collectively own and control that industry.*

It is not my business in this particular essay to defend the conception of democracy underlying these conditions. It does not seem to be the conception of democracy held by the Labour Party, the Trade Union Congress, the Communist Party, Mr. Churchill or President Roosevelt; but nevertheless I would claim that it is the classical conception of democracy as gradually evolved by its philosophers—by Rousseau, Jefferson, Lincoln, Proudhon, Owen, Ruskin, Marx, Morris, Kropotkin, and whoever else was democratic in his heart no less than in his head. But what I intend to demonstrate here is that the higher values of life, the democratic equivalent of the civilization of Greece or of the Middle Ages, cannot be achieved unless by democracy we mean a form of society in which all these three conditions are satisfied.

I think it will be generally admitted that production for use and not for profit is the basic economic doctrine of socialism. The opponents of socialism might argue that only a lunatic would neglect to take into consideration the needs of the public. But that is to miss the whole point of the statement. Capitalists do, of course, produce for use, and even invent uses for which to produce—in their own language, they create a demand. By their intensive methods of production and their extensive methods of publicity they have keyed up the machinery of production to unimagined levels, and up to a point mankind has benefited from the resulting plethora. Unfortunately capitalism has not been able to solve the problem of supplying the consumer with sufficient purchasing power to absorb this plethora: it could only invent various methods of restricting production so as to prevent a plethora.

Capitalism can produce the goods, even if it cannot sell them. But what kind of goods? It is here that we have to introduce

our aesthetic criterion—and don't let anyone be frightened by the word aesthetic. Let us first note that the quality of the goods so lavishly produced under capitalism varies enormously. Whatever you take—carpets or chairs, houses or clothes, cigarettes or sausages, you will find that there are not one but twenty or thirty grades—something very good and efficient at the top of the scale, and something very cheap and nasty at the bottom of the scale. And pyramid-like, the bottom of the scale is enormously bigger than the top.

Take the case of the chair you are sitting on as you read this book. It may be one of three things: (1) a decent well-made chair inherited from your great-great-grandmother; (2) a decent well-made chair which you bought at an expensive shop; or (3) an indifferent, uncomfortable chair, shabby after a year's use, which was the best you could afford. (There are some subsidiary categories—expensive chairs which are also uncomfortable, for example; and moderately comfortable seats in public vehicles.)

Production for profit means that, at whatever cost to the comfort, appearance and durability of the chair, the capitalist must put chairs on the market to suit every kind of purse. And since the chair will be competing with other needs—carpets, clocks and sewing-machines—it must cost as little as possible even on the low scale of purchasing power at which he is aiming. Hence the capitalist must progressively lower the quality of the materials he is using: he must use cheap wood and little of it, cheap springs and cheap upholstery. He must evolve a design which is cheap to produce and easy to sell, which means that he must disguise his cheap materials with veneer and varnish and other shams. Even if he is aiming at the top market, he still has to remember his margin of profits; and as the size of the market shrinks, and mass production becomes less possible, this margin has to be increased. That is to say, the difference between the intrinsic value of the materials used and the price charged to the consumer has to be bigger; and the subterfuges necessary to disguise this difference have to be cleverer.

It is then that the capitalist has to put on, among other things, a bit of culture—a claw-and-ball foot in the manner of Chippen-dale, a wriggly bit of scrollwork in papier-maché, an inlay of mother-of-pearl. In extreme cases he must “distress” the piece—that is to say, employ a man to throw bolts and nails at the chair until it has been knocked about enough to look “antique.”

Such is production for profit. By production for use we mean a system which will have only two considerations in mind—function and fulfilment. You want a chair to relax in—very well, we shall discover what are the best angles to allow a man’s limbs to rest freely and without strain. We shall next consider which would be the most suitable materials to use in the manufacture of such a chair, bearing in mind, not only the purpose the chair has to serve, but also the other furniture with which the chair will be associated. Then, and then only, we shall design a chair to meet all these requirements. Finally we shall set about making the chair, and when it is made to our satisfaction, we shall offer it to you in exchange for the tokens which represent the good work which, all the time we were making the chair, you were doing for the community at your particular job.

That is the economic process under socialism. But I am supposed to be writing about spiritual values—about beauty and all that sort of thing, and where do they come in? We have produced a chair which is strong and comfortable, but is it a work of art?

The answer, according to my philosophy of art, is Yes. If an object is made of appropriate materials to an appropriate design and perfectly fulfils its function, then we need not worry any more about its aesthetic value: it is *automatically* a work of art. Fitness for function is the modern definition of the eternal quality we call beauty, and this fitness for function is the inevitable result of an economy directed to use and not to profit.

Incidentally, we may note that when the profit system has to place function before profit, as in the production of an aeroplane or a racing-car, it also inevitably produces a work of art.

But the question to ask is: why are not all the things produced under capitalism as beautiful as its aeroplanes and racing-cars?

The second condition of democracy is expressed in the Marxian slogan: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

This condition is linked to the one we have already discussed. To take the question of ability first. A profit system of production subordinates the person to the job. In a rough-and-ready way it sorts people out according to their ability: that is to say, it continues to employ a man only so long as he is capable of doing the job efficiently, and only so long as there is a job to do. It rarely asks whether a particular man would be better at another job, and it gives that man little or no opportunity of finding out whether he could do another job better. Capitalism is concerned with labour only as a power element, the partner of steam and electricity. And since the cost of this power has to be reckoned against the possible profits, capitalism does all it can to reduce that cost.

One way of reducing the cost is to increase the quantity of work per human unit. Capitalism (and state socialism as established in Russia) introduces the time element into the calculation of results. The best riveter is the man who can fix the greatest number of rivets in a given time. The best miner is the man who can excavate the greatest quantity of coal in a given time. This time criterion is extended to all forms of production, and it is always at war with the criterion of quality. When the work is purely mechanical, the qualitative element may not be compromised. A quick riveter may also be a good riveter. But if the work requires any considerable degree of skill, care or deliberation, then the quality will decline in inverse ratio to the speed of production. This applies, not only to "artistic" work such as painting and sculpture, but also to "practical" work such as grinding the cylinders of an aero-engine or ploughing a field.

From each according to his ability can be replaced by another familiar phrase—equality of opportunity. In a natural society

it should be possible for people to sort themselves out so that every man and woman is doing the job for which he or she feels naturally qualified; and if, in this respect, nature needs a little assistance, it can be provided by schools and technical colleges which will enable young people to discover themselves and their abilities.

That half of the slogan does not present much difficulty: it is obviously reasonable that the right man should have the right job, and that he should do that job to the best of his ability. But then we say: "to each according to his needs", and this is the more important half, and the essentially democratic half, of the socialist doctrine.

Let us ask: what are the needs of each one of us? Sufficient food and clothing, adequate housing—a certain minimum of these necessities should be the inalienable right of every member of the community. Until it can provide these minimum necessities, a society must be branded as inhuman and inefficient.

And that is perhaps all that early socialists like Marx and Engels meant by the phrase "to each according to his needs". But the underlying assumption of this essay is that in any civilization worth living in, the needs of man are not merely material. He hungers for other things—for beauty, for companionship, for joy. These, too, a natural society must provide.

We have already seen that by establishing a system of production for use we shall inevitably secure the first of these spiritual needs—beauty. To see how the other spiritual values will be secured we must turn to the third condition of democracy—workers' ownership of industry.

This is a controversial issue, even within the democratic ranks. Since that fatal day in 1872 when Marx scuttled the First International, the socialist movement has been split into two irreconcilable camps. The fundamental nature of the division has been hidden by a confusion of names and a multiplicity of leagues, alliances, federations and societies. But the issue is simply whether industry is to be controlled from the

bottom upwards, by the workers and their elected delegates; or whether it is to be centralized and controlled from the top, by an abstraction we call the state, but which in effect means a small and exclusive class of bureaucrats.

The historical fact that everywhere in the north of Europe—Germany, Scandinavia, France and Great Britain—the authoritarian or bureaucratic conception of socialism triumphed should not blind us to the still living issue. For this “conceptual” triumph somehow has not brought with it what we mean by a democracy. Indeed, in most of the countries named it has brought about just the opposite phenomenon—the anti-democratic state of Hitler, Mussolini, and their satraps Pétain, Franco, Quisling, Antonescu, etc.

Do not let us deceive ourselves in thinking that this New Order which Hitler is trying to establish in Europe is merely a temporary phase of reactionaryism. Reactionary it is, in the deepest sense of the word, for it denies the advance of the human spirit; and it offers sinister accommodations to the industrial capitalists who have been democracy’s most bitter enemies. But in many of its features it is but a development or adaptation of that authoritarian form of socialism which Marx made the predominant form of socialism. It even claims the name of socialism, and it is somewhat unfortunate that this fact is disguised and forgotten in the popular contraction: Nazi. Hitler’s New Order is socialist in that it establishes a centralized state control of all production. It is socialist in that it establishes a system of social security—guaranteed employment, fair rates of wages, organized amenities of various kinds. It is socialist in that it subordinates the financial system to the industrial system. In many ways it is professedly socialist, but it remains profoundly undemocratic. Because whatever it gives in the shape of social security, it takes away in spiritual liberty. Every Nazi worker must sell his soul before he can belong to this New Order.

- The Nazis, as I have already said, are very culture-conscious—as culture-conscious as Matthew Arnold and all our Victorian forefathers. But the more conscious they become of culture,

the less capable they become of producing it. Nazi Germany, in the ten years of its supremacy and intensive cultivation of the arts, has not been able to produce for the admiration of the world a single artist of any kind. Most of its great writers and painters—Thomas Mann, Franz Werfel, Oskar Kokoschka and many others—are living in exile. A few great artists who have remained in Germany—the composer Strauss, for example—are too old to produce any new work of significance, and too indifferent to the political order to want to produce anything at all. There are a few writers of integrity and genius who remain in Germany—I am thinking particularly of Hans Carossa and Ernst Robert Curtius—but they must be living in spiritual agony. For this general impotence the Nazi leaders may offer the excuse of war and revolution, but other wars and revolutions have been an immediate inspiration to poets and painters. The great Romantic Movement in literature, for example, was directly inspired by the French Revolution, and all the storm and stress of the wars that followed could not diminish its force.

The position in Italy is exactly the same, and shows in addition that the time factor makes no difference. It is twenty years since Mussolini and his blackshirts marched on Rome (or travelled there in a railway carriage), but in all that time not a single work of art of universal significance has come from that country—nothing but bombast and vulgarity.

There is only one explanation of this failure of the Fascist and Nazi Revolutions to inspire a great art, and I cannot describe it better than in the words of Giovanni Gentile, a liberal philosopher who sold himself to the fascist régime. Speaking to an audience of teachers in Trieste shortly after that city had fallen into Italian hands at the end of the last war, he declared: "*Spiritual activity works only in the plenitude of freedom.*" It was a fine moment for the Italian people, and this was a fine sentiment to match the occasion. More than twenty years have passed, and Gentile has served Mussolini as his Minister of Education for most of that time, and has done as much as anyone to give fascism a decent covering of in-

tellectual respectability. As he surveys the tyranny he has helped to establish and sees all around him a spiritual poverty in keeping with an economic poverty, it is possible that this sad and disillusioned man may still repeat, in a whisper which is only heard in the secret recesses of his own mind: Spiritual activity works only in the plenitude of freedom.

One thing must be admitted: the lack of any spiritual activity in Germany and Italy is not due to a lack of official encouragement. In Germany there is a vast organization, the Reichskulturkammer, charged with the specific task of supervising cultural activities of every kind, and in Italy there is a similar display of state patronage. Outside the fascist countries there is a parallel activity in Russia, and in the U.S.A. there is the Federal Arts Project. This latter organization has a different aim: to relieve distress among artists rather than to encourage the production of a national type of art. But all four types of state patronage illustrate the same truth--that no amount of sauce will disguise the staleness of the underlying fish. You cannot buy the spiritual values which make the greatness of a nation's art: you cannot even cultivate them unless you prepare the soil. And that soil is freedom--not Freedom with a capital F, not an abstraction of any kind, but simply "letting alone".

"Letting alone" is not the same as "*laissez-faire*". A person is not left alone if he has a cupboard full of cares. He must be left alone with sufficient food and shelter to safeguard his health, and he must be left alone with sufficient material to work with. Then "*laissez-faire*"--then let him do what he likes to do.

To keep a class of people in comfort and then let them do what they please offends the sense of social equity--every dustman might then set up as an artist. But that is not exactly what I propose. I have said: 'To hell with culture; and to this consignment we might add another: To hell with the artist. *Art as a separate profession is merely a consequence of culture as a separate entity.* In a natural society there will be no precious or privileged beings called artists: there will only be workers. Or, if you prefer Gill's more paradoxical statement of the same truth: in a natural society there will be no despised



and unprivileged beings called workers: there will only be artists. "The artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist."<sup>1</sup>

But among workers there are various degrees of ability. And the people capable of recognizing this ability are the workers themselves in their several professions. For example, architects and engineers will know which few individuals among them design so superlatively well that they deserve, for the common good, to be exempted from routine tasks and encouraged to devote their energies to those types of work which are not so much utilitarian as "creative"—that is to say, expressive of their own inventive intuitions or perhaps of collective needs—needs which are inarticulate until the artist gives them actuality.

It is the same with every other type of artist—the painter and the sculptor no less than the architect and the engineer. The possible exception is the poet, the "divine literatus" to whom Whitman gave such a vital function in the democratic vista. There is no basic profession which stands in the same relation to poetry as building does to architecture. Writing is, of course, a profession, and in a democratic society it should have its appropriate guild or collective—as it has in Russia to-day. Once it is free from the rivalries and log-rolling which accompany writing for profit (or writing on the backs of advertisements, as Chesterton called journalism), a Writers' Guild might be entrusted with the economic organization of this particular kind of work; but genius will often elude its systematic survey. Against this eventuality there can be no social safeguard. There are certain types of genius which are always in advance of the general level of sensibility—even the general level of professional sensibility. In the past such men have been frustrated or have been starved. In a natural society they will at least avoid the second fate

Production for use, mutual aid, workers' control—these are

<sup>1</sup> Gill took this paradox from the writings of another wise man, Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy; it sums up the teachings of William Morris and the practice of the medieval guild system.

the slogans of democracy, and these are the slogans of a creative civilization. There is nothing mysterious or difficult about such a civilization; indeed, some of the primitive civilizations still existing in remote corners of the world, and many primitive civilizations of the past, including that of prehistoric man, deserve to be called creative. What they make, if it is only a plaited basket or an unpainted pot, they make with instinctive rightness and directness. It is impossible to compare such primitive communities with our own highly organized modes of living, but their social economy in its simple way answers to our slogans. Production is for use and not for profit; and all work is done without compulsion for the general benefit of the community. On their simple level of living there is ample social security, and no man sells his labour to a middleman or boss: work is either individual or communal, and in either case it is free from the dispiriting influences of slavery and manumission.

But we are not a primitive society and there is no need to become primitive in order to secure the essentials of democratic liberty. We want to retain all our scientific and industrial triumphs—electric power, machine tools, mass production and the rest. We do not propose to revert to the economy of the handloom and the plough—ideal as this may seem in retrospect. We propose that the workers and technicians who have *made* the modern instruments of production should *control* them—control their use and determine the flow of their production. It can be done. Russia has shown that the essential organization can be created, and we should not be blinded to the significance of that great achievement by the perversion it has suffered at the hands of bureaucrats. For a brief spell democratic Spain showed us that workers' control could be an efficient reality. Workers' control can be established in this country, and there is not much point in discussing the finer values of civilization until that essential change has been effected.

The fundamental truth about economics is that the methods and instruments of production, freely used and fairly used, are capable of giving every human being a decent standard of living.

The factors which obstruct the free and fair use of the methods and instruments of production are the factors which must disappear before a natural society can be established. Whatever these factors are—an obsolete financial system, the private ownership of property, rent and usury—they are anti-democratic factors, and prevent the establishment of a natural society and consequently prevent the establishment of a creative civilization.

Economics are outside the scope of this book, but I cannot avoid them. Unless the present economic system is abolished, its roots eradicated and all its intricate branches lopped, the first conditions for a democratic alternative to the fake culture of our present civilization are not satisfied. For this reason one cannot be very specific about the features of a democratic culture. Engineers and designers can make the working drawings for a motor-car, and granted the right kind of machinery, they can be sure that the type of car they have designed will run when it is completed. But they cannot predict where that car will travel. A democratic culture is the journey a democratic society will make when once it has been established. If it is well made we know that our democratic society will travel far. And with the man for whom it was made at the wheel, we can be sure that it will travel in the right direction, discovering new countries, new prospects, new climates. We have already had brief glimpses down these democratic vistas, and presently I shall describe them more fully. But first let us take a backward glance at the dump we propose to leave behind us.

I write, not as a philistine, but as a man who could not only claim to be cultured in the accepted sense of the word, but who has actually devoted most of his life to cultural things—to the practice of the arts of the present and the elucidation of the arts of the past. My philosophy is a direct product of my aesthetic experience, and I believe that life without art would be a graceless and brutish existence. I could not live without the spiritual values of art. I know that some people are insensitive to these values, but before allowing myself to pity or despise such people, I try to imagine how they got themselves

into such a poor state of mind. The more I consider such people, the more clearly I begin to perceive that though there may be a minority who have been hopelessly brutalized by their environment and upbringing, the great majority are not insensitive, but indifferent. They have sensibility, but the thing we call culture does not stir them. Architecture and sculpture, painting and poetry, are not the immediate concerns of their lives. They are therefore not sensibly moved by the baroque rhetoric of St. Paul's, or the painted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or any of the minor monuments of our culture. If they go into a museum or art gallery, they move about with dead eyes: they have strayed among people who do not speak their language, with whom they cannot by any means communicate.

Now the common assumption is that this strayed riveter, as we may call him, should set about it and learn the language of this strange country—that he should attend museum lectures and adult education classes in the little spare time he has, and so gradually lift himself on to the cultured level. Our whole educational system is built on that assumption, and very few democrats would be found to question it. And yet a moment's consideration should convince us that an educational system which is built on such an assumption is fundamentally wrong, and fundamentally undemocratic. Our riveter has probably strayed from a cheerless street in Birmingham, where he inhabits a mean little house furnished with such shoddy comforts as he has been able to afford out of his inadequate wage. I need not pursue the man's life in all its dreary detail: there he stands, typical of millions of workers in this country, his clumsy boots on the parquet floor, and you are asking him to appreciate a painting by Botticelli or a bust by Bernini, a Spanish textile or a fine piece of Limoges enamel. If drink is the shortest road out of Manchester, there is a possibility that art may be the shortest road out of Birmingham; but it will not be a crowded road, and only a very odd and eccentric worker will be found to respond to the aesthetic thrills that run down a cultured spine.

culture will begin in a *similar* way. We shall not revert to the peasant's hut or the potter's wheel. We shall begin with the elements of modern industry—electric power, metal alloys, cement, the tractor and the aeroplane. We shall consider these things as the raw materials of a civilization and we shall work out their appropriate use and appropriate forms, without reference to the lath and plaster of the past.

To-day we are bound hand and foot to the past. Because property is a sacred thing and land values a source of untold wealth, our houses must be crowded together and our streets must follow their ancient illogical meanderings. Because houses must be built at the lowest possible cost to allow the highest possible profit, they are denied the art and science of the architect. Because everything we buy for use must be sold for profit, and because there must always be this profitable margin between cost and price, our pots and our pans, our furniture and our clothes, have the same shoddy consistency, the same competitive cheapness. The whole of our capitalist culture is one immense veneer: a surface refinement hiding the cheapness and shoddiness at the heart of things.

To hell with such a culture! To the rubbish-heap and furnace with it all! Let us celebrate the democratic revolution with the biggest holocaust in the history of the world. When Hitler has finished bombing our cities, let the demolition squads complete the good work. Then let us go out into the wide open spaces and build anew.

Let us build cities that are not too big, but spacious, with traffic flowing freely through their leafy avenues, with children playing safely in their green and flowery parks, with people living happily in bright efficient houses. Let us place our factories and workshops where natural conditions of supply make their location most convenient—the necessary electric power can be laid on anywhere. Let us balance agriculture and industry, town and country—let us do all these sensible and elementary things and *then* let us talk about our culture.

A culture of pots and pans! some of my readers may cry contemptuously. I do not despise a culture of pots and pans,

because, as I have already said, the best civilizations of the past may be judged by their pots and pans. But what I am now asserting, as a law of history no less than as a principle of social economy, is that until a society can produce beautiful pots and pans as naturally as it grows potatoes, it will be incapable of those higher forms of art which in the past have taken the form of temples and cathedrals, epics and dramas.

As for the past, let the past take care of itself. I know that there is such a thing as tradition, but in so far as it is valuable it is a body of technical knowledge—the mysteries of the old guilds—and can safely be entrusted to the care of the new guilds. There is a traditional way of thatching haystacks and a traditional way of writing sonnets: they can be learned by any apprentice. If I am told that this is not the profoundest meaning of the word tradition, I will not be obtuse; but I will merely suggest that the state of the world to-day is a sufficient comment on those traditional embodiments of wisdom, ecclesiastical or academic, which we are expected to honour. The cultural problem, we are told by these traditionalists, is at bottom a spiritual, even a religious one. But this is not true. At least, it is no truer of the cultural problem than of the economic problem, or any of the other problems which await solution.

Let us now suppose that we have got our democratic society, with its right way of living and its basic culture of pots and pans. How then do we proceed to build on this foundation?

My belief is that culture is a natural growth—that if a society has a plenitude of freedom and all the economic essentials of a democratic way of life, then culture will be added without any excessive striving after it. It will come as naturally as the fruit to the well-planted tree. But when I describe the tree as “well-planted”, I am perhaps implying more than a good soil and a sheltered position—the conditions which correspond to the political and economic provisions of a natural society. I am perhaps implying a gardener to look after the tree, to safeguard it from pests, to prune away the growth when it is too crowded,

to cut out the dead wood. I am. The wild fruit-tree is not to be despised: it is a pretty thing to look at, and it is the healthy stock from which all our garden trees have been cultivated. But cultivation is the distinctive power of man, the power which has enabled him to progress from the animal and the savage state. In his progress man has cultivated, not only animals and plants, but also his own kind. It is just this self-cultivation which we call education, and cultivation, when man directs it to his own species, naturally includes the cultivation of those senses and faculties by means of which man gives form and shape to the things he makes.

I cannot deal adequately with this aspect of my subject without going into the whole question of education in a democratic society, and that subject I have dealt with in another book.<sup>1</sup> But I must state my point of view, because it is fundamental. Briefly, then, I cannot conceive education as a training in so many separate subjects. Education is integral: it is the encouragement of the growth of the whole man, the complete man. It follows that it is not entirely, nor even mainly, an affair of book learning, for that is only the education of one part of our nature—that part of the mind which deals with concepts and abstractions. In the child, who is not yet mature enough to think by these short-cut methods, it should be largely an education of the senses—the senses of sight, touch and hearing: in one word, the education of the *sensibility*. From this point of view there is no valid distinction between art and science: there is only the whole man with his diverse interests and faculties, and the aim of education should be to develop all these in harmony and completeness.

It was Rousseau who first realized this truth, and since Rousseau's time there have been several great educationalists—Froebel, Montessori, Dalcroze, Dewey—who have worked out the practical methods of such an education of the sensibility. It is significant that the last of these, John Dewey, has been led to the conclusion that there is an intimate connection between the right kind of education and a democratic society. You can't

<sup>1</sup> *Education Through Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 1943).

have a good educational system except in a democracy—only a democracy guarantees the essential freedom. Equally, you can't have a real democracy without a true system of education; for only by education can a society teach that respect for natural law which is the basis of democracy.

"I cannot repeat too often that it is only objects which can be perceived by the senses which can have any interest for children, especially children whose vanity has not been stimulated nor their minds corrupted by social conventions." This observation of Rousseau's should be the foundation of our educational methods. A child learns through its senses, and its senses are stimulated by objects—first by natural objects, and then by objects which are the creation of man. Elementary education should teach children how to use their senses—how to see, to touch, to listen—it is far from easy to learn the full and exact use of these faculties. Then, having learned how to use the senses, separately and conjointly, the child should learn how to apply his knowledge: how to judge and compare the true reports which are rendered by his senses; how to construct things which give a true sensuous response and, finally, how to construct things which express his growing awareness of the world and its potentialities.

If we return to our pot and think of the delicate balance of the senses of sight and touch which must guide the potter as the clay turns between his finger-tips, we get some idea of the individual factors involved in all creative activity. If we then remember that the potter must direct the work of his senses towards some useful end—for the pot must function—we get some idea of the social factor involved in all creative activity. Substitute for the potter and his clay any worker and his material, and you are at the heart of all cultural activity: the same conditions persist, from the pot to the poem, from the cottage to the cathedral, from the horse-shoe to the aero-engine. Sensibility is the secret of success.

There are degrees of sensibility, just as there are degrees of skill, and education cannot, and should not, smooth them out. But I do not think a democratic society should unduly honour



the possessor of exceptional sensibility. It is a gift he owes to the chances of birth, and the possibility of exercising his gift he owes to the society in which he lives. So much of the world's great art is anonymous, and is none the worse, or none the less appreciated, for the fact. Art always aspires to the impersonal. When every man is an artist, who should claim to be a superman? Which is only a modern version of the oldest and best of democratic slogans: When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?

When once a democratic society is established, it will inevitably lead to the creation of new values in art, literature, music and science. In some distant time men will call these new values the Democratic Civilization, or the Culture of Democracy, and I believe it will be the greatest and most permanent culture ever created by man. It will have the universal values which we associate with the greatest names in the culture of the past—the universality of Æschylus, Dante and Shakespeare; and it will have these values in a less obscure and a less imperfect form. Æschylus and Dante and Shakespeare are immortal, but they addressed themselves to imperfect societies: to societies still full of moral cruelty, social injustice and perverse superstitions; their works are “poisonous to the idea of the pride and dignity of the common people, the life-blood of democracy”. The limitations of their audiences hindered, in however small degree, the expression of their vision. A perfect society will not necessarily produce perfect works of art; but in so far as it does produce works of art, the very fact that the artist is appealing to a more highly developed form of society will induce a higher degree of perfection. The artist has a more perfect instrument on which to play.

We should not be discouraged by the fact that all hitherto consciously democratic art has suffered from having to be produced within the framework of a capitalist society. Hitherto not only has the democratic artist had to compromise with the means of communication open to him as a member of a capitalist order—the press, the cinema, the theatre, etc.—but he has had to use the human material and dramatic situations incidental

to that order of society. His only alternative has been to stand self-consciously aside, limiting himself to "workers" and their experiences—all of which explains the dreariness and monotony of most so-called "proletarian art". The artist cannot restrict himself to sectional interests of this kind without detriment to his art: he is only "all out" and capable of his greatest range when the society he works for is integral, and as wide and varied as humanity itself. It is only in so far as he is simply "human" that he is wholly "great"; and it is only in a democratic society that the artist can address humanity and society in the same terms.

To this general rule we must admit certain rare exceptions. Certain types of art are "archetypal". That is to say, though they may have a limited range—indeed, by the nature of things, must have this limited range—they are formally perfect. A song by Shakespeare or Blake, a melody by Bach or Mozart, a Persian carpet or a Greek vase—such "forms", in the words of Keats, "tease us out of thought as doth eternity". They tease us out of our human preoccupations—the theme of epic and drama and novel—and for a few brief seconds hold us suspended in a timeless existence. Such rare moments are beyond daily reality, supersocial and in a sense superhuman. But in relation to the whole body of what we call "art", they are but the glittering pinnacles, and below them spreads the solid structure of human ideals, human vision and human insight: the world of passion and of sentiment, of love and labour and brotherhood.

The only person who seems to have escaped the limitations that have inevitably beset artists of the predemocratic eras is a poet who, in spite of his evident weaknesses, is a prototype or forerunner of the democratic artist—I mean Walt Whitman. The nineteenth-century America in which he lived was by no means a perfect democracy; but the early Americans, especially Jefferson and Lincoln, had had a clear vision of the requisites of a democratic society, and they inspired Whitman with the ambition to be the first poet of this new order. He was fired by a realization of the tremendous

potentialities of the New World into which he had been born:

"Sole among nationalities, these States have assumed the task to put in forms of lasting power and practicality, on areas of amplitude rivaling the operations of the physical kosmos, the moral political speculations of ages, long, long deferr'd, the democratic republican principle, and the theory of development and perfection by voluntary standards, and self-reliance."

But these potentialities could never be realized on the political plane alone:

"I say that democracy can never prove itself beyond cavil, until it founds and luxuriantly grows its own forms of art, poems, schools, theology, displacing all that exists, or that has been produced anywhere in the past, under opposite influences."

"*The priest departs, the divine literatus comes.*" In these words Walt Whitman sums up the whole argument of this essay. But let the reader turn to *Democratic Vistas*, that credo of Walt Whitman's from which my quotations come, and let him find there in fullness the essential democratic truths, and in particular those that relate to the enduring values of human life, and to their expression in enduring works of art. And from this prose work of the good grey poet let the reader turn to *Leaves of Grass* and see if he does not find there, shining through the crudities and contradictions which Whitman himself was the first to admit, the lineaments of our divine literatus, our democratic poet and exemplar. Such may not be the form of the art of the future, but it is its prophetic spirit—

"Expanding and swift, henceforth,  
Elements, breeds, adjustments, turbulent, quick and  
audacious,  
A world primal again, vistas of glory incessant and branch-  
ing,

A new race dominating previous ones and grander far,  
with new contests,  
New politics, new literature and religions, new inventions  
and arts.

These, my voice announcing—I will sleep no more but  
arise,  
You oceans that have been calm within me! how I feel  
you, fathomless, stirring, preparing unprecedented  
waves and storms.”

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## Art in an Electric Atmosphere

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*"Maybe we'll fix it so life won't be printed on dollar bills."*

Ralph, in *Awake and Sing!*, by CLIFFORD ODETS.

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ON Thursday, 17th April 1941, the morning after the great raid on London, I was compelled to walk from the City to the West End. There were no buses running on that route, and the few taxis crunched their way slowly and uncertainly over the glass-strewn streets. As I came near to St. Paul's I found all the approaches blocked. I had to turn and make my way across the Thames by Southwark Bridge. The warehouses and tenements on the south bank were desolate and unnaturally still. I recrossed the river by Blackfriars Bridge and found the Strand blocked. Another detour took me through the Covent Garden district, past burning ruins in Leicester Square, and so into Piccadilly, looking sultry under a smoke-screened sun.

There was plenty to think about on that long walk. I had passed the Bank of England, the cathedral dedicated to St. Paul—a better symbol of the Church of England than the Gothic abbey farther up the river—the offices of the *Times*, and I had ended up near the Royal Academy. But I did not think of these buildings and their symbolism, but of the inexplicable calm of the people I had seen, sweeping up the broken glass, removing their goods from their gaping shopfronts, directing hoses on to the smoking débris. If you have been in an accident you are shaken: you generally stutter a bit and turn pale. These people, after a night of relentless bombing, were not even bad-tempered: they were just normal, unnaturally normal. British phlegm? Cockney imperturbability? Or

apathetic minds unable to measure the extent and significance of the disaster in which they were involved? I had no clear explanation, but as I crossed Blackfriars Bridge and looked at the long reach of the river, the ugly incoherent buildings thrusting their bleached façades into the haze, the slowly mounting columns of smoke, I realized that I too was unnaturally calm, one of these millions to whom the phrase "going about his business" now meant "picking his way among the ruins"

But the ruins, I reflected, were not merely so much rubble and twisted steel. The endless and intricate structures of a civilization were falling down. It was not merely the jewellers' and furriers' shops, the workmen's tenements and the warehouses which I had passed: it was also the Bank of England and the Royal Academy, the Church of England and the *Times*. These institutions, too, were among the ruins, and if they survived at all, they would have to be rebuilt in a new style. And to be quite honest, many less conservative institutions were looking a bit shaken in that morning air—the Labour Party and the frustrated rump of the Communist Party, for example. And all the bright young art societies, so hopeful and experimental before the war—what had become of them? Indeed, it seemed in this lurid April light that all our institutions, institutes, associations and federations had become so many empty forms, structures with their windows blown out, their walls cracked, their reports and memoranda a heap of sodden ashes.

We shall rebuild, of course. Even if we are defeated we shall rebuild. In 1920 a defeated Germany was able to rebuild, and a movement in the arts far more vital than anything that had existed before the war had been born. It was afterwards to be destroyed by the Nazis, but it was destroyed because it was not vital enough, not revolutionary enough. It compromised with its capitalist patrons, its bourgeois democrats and bureaucrats. The situation was the same in France. The Paris that survived the last war, the Paris of Picasso and Stravinsky, was vital enough. But its vitality was unrelated to a political philosophy, to any social integrity. A writer might be revolutionary, but

he still aspired to the laurels of the Académie Française, or to the entrée to some fashionable salon. Only the surrealists had any integrity, and they did their best not to be taken seriously.

The trouble with the last time, say our amateur statesmen, was that Germany was not properly subjugated; she was defeated but not disintegrated. The implication is that we must not make that mistake again. But the trouble with the last time was also that we were not essentially victorious. We muddled through to victory, and when November 1918 came, nothing was changed. The same rotten system that had brought about the war staggered through the consequent mess on American stilts. Power remained in tainted hands: the politicians, here and in France, talked boogie-woogie to the public while behind the scenes the monopolists concentrated their power for another struggle. Militarists whose existence was threatened by disarmament, diplomats whose function was reduced to insignificance by the League of Nations, kept the hate fires burning. And now the conflagration they lit is blown back in their own faces. The flames are no longer metaphorical. They roar and crackle through the banks and building societies, through the offices of insurance companies and stockbrokers. The roofs fall and the debt rises. Finance is no longer a reality: it has become a fantasy in whose reality even economists no longer believe. The only realities are tanks and aeroplanes, ships and food, productive labour of all kinds.

Meanwhile artists and writers, the producers of culture, were gradually absorbed into the war machine. Seeing our weakening ranks, the philistines sent up a shout of triumph. The *Times* celebrated "the eclipse of the highbrow", and Lord Elton told us that we should not have despised the unspectacular virtues—endurance, unselfishness and discipline. As in the last war, reactionaries console themselves with the thought that communists and artists and the so-called avant-garde were a lot of stormy petrels announcing the storm that has now broken over us: that when the storm has passed there will be calm again, no noisy birds, a stable society and a classical art. They ignore the fact that the modern movement has its roots

far back in the nineteenth century; that it is only modern in the sense that modern science is modern, or modern political theory. Modern art, in fact, is merely one expression of that principle of revolution which throughout the history has been the only infallible index of vitality.<sup>1</sup> What the last war did was to accelerate or intensify in the arts that restless spirit of experiment or adventure which was the prevalent spiritual condition of the time. I see no reason why the present war should affect the arts in any different way.

Unless our civilization is to disappear completely, the post-war period must in all spheres of human activity be not less but more dynamic than any previous period known to history. This is no age of easy transitions. Even Mr. Churchill, however unwilling to define the future, admits that if we emerge victorious from this struggle for freedom and progress, there will be an "electric atmosphere" in the world which will demand an enormously accelerated advance towards social unity and justice. He was addressing a luncheon-party given jointly by the British Employers' Federation and the Trade Union Congress, and it is possible that his idea of what constitutes social unity and justice differed from that of one half of the audience he was addressing. But about the nature of the situation in which we shall find ourselves at the end of the war there could be, in such a realistic assembly, no difference of opinion. War will give place to social revolution, to vast movements of spiritual revulsion and ardent, hopeful planning. The realists, among whom we can confidently place Mr. Churchill, know this, and their only headache is how to control, to their own ultimate interests, the frenzies that have been released from the ruins of capitalist economy. It sometimes seems as though they realize they will need the co-operation of the artist and the poet no less than that of the practical man.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. William James: "All the higher, more penetrating ideals are revolutionary. They present themselves far less in the guise of effects of past experience than in that of probable causes of future experience, factors to which the environment and the lessons it has so far taught us must learn to bend."—*The Will to Believe*, pp. 188-9.



But it is not for a moment to be supposed that the architects and the painters, the sculptors and the poets of the post-war period will meet the groaning gestation around them with the helpless conformist accents and moral banalities which our preachers and politicians have been accustomed to interpose between their audiences and reality. On the contrary, the art of the future will be more experimental and revolutionary than any we have known in the between-war years. It is precisely in this, its increased revolutionary tempo, that it *must* be different.

As for the "common man", for whom even the *Times* has recently shown such an unusual concern, he does not find a place in the society of the future—neither the common nor the uncommon man. While it is true enough that people differ in sensibility, intelligence and power of invention, I do not think that this is a difference which can be expressed as artist *v.* common man. Such terms as artist and layman, craftsman and amateur, seem to imply the continuance of a class society differentiated, not according to function, but according to taste, or wealth, or some equally irrelevant standard. But the society we contemplate, and to whose establishment we shall devote if necessary a positive phase of this revolutionary war when the present negative phase (the war *against* fascism) is over, this new society will have no use for cultural élites, whether of Burlington House or Printing House Square. It will have no use for any "culture" that does not spring spontaneously from the progressive energy of the people, and from a people not debased by financial slavery and social subserviency, but a people confident and manly, and above all creative. That the art of such a people will differ radically from the academic art of the past twenty years is not to be denied; but it will not tend to mildness, to moderation, or even to simplicity, that last infirmity of lazy minds. The great art of the past—the art of Æschylus, of Dante, of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Beethoven—was not simple<sup>1</sup> in the sense

<sup>1</sup> When Milton wrote that poetry should be *more* simple, sensuous and passionate *than* rhetoric, he did not imply that poetry should necessarily be easy, placid and platitudinous.

implied by those who complain of the obscurity and perversity of modern art; it was the art of epochs as complex as our own, and it has its relevant artistic complexity, which still baffles the elucidatory efforts of scholars and commentators. The art of the post-war period will be no less complex, or it will fail to represent the period and to appeal to the deepest instincts of the people of the period.

*Culture* may be easy: it can be obtained in a pre-digested form from guide-books and history-books, from manuals and polite essays. It can be worn like a suit from Sackville Street or cultivated like an Oxford accent. But *art* is difficult, just because it is creative and original—the tight apex of the unfolding bud of human consciousness. There will be lazy people in the future, just as there have been lazy people in the past, who will not make the necessary effort to sharpen their sensibilities against the astringent light; but in the future, let us hope, there will be fewer of them. Because on the effort to understand art depends the effort to understand life, to understand the principle of liberty which makes life, and which makes human progress.

If I am asked what the art of the post-war period will be like, I become as vague as Mr. Churchill. I can only reply that it will be an expression of the society we then establish. If we go back to the government of the Bank of England and the City, to preposterous monopolies exploiting the essentials of life, to a parliament of fools and an underworld of crime, then we shall go back to an art of convention, sentimentality and pride against which a few revolutionary protests will be more vain and ineffective than ever. But if we discard the notions of victory and defeat, if through common suffering we are driven to humility and goodwill, then reason may prevail in human affairs and we shall build up from the ruins a society free from the grotesque and irrational institutions of finance, snobbery and greed. The art which will then arise as a spontaneous expression of the spiritual life of such a society will bear no obvious relation to any art that exists now. It will incorporate, for those who have eyes to see beneath the surfaces, the eternal

harmonies of all great art; but it will be so original in its outward manifestations that its first impact must inevitably seem, and be, revolutionary. But in so far as we shall then all be revolutionaries, and art as we know it now will have disappeared in the flames like so much dusty plush, what might be called revolutionary in the language of to-day will then be simply creative.

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## The Vulgarities and Impotence of Contemporary Art

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*The task of art is enormous. Through the influence of real art, aided by science, guided by religion, that peaceful co-operation of man which is now maintained by external means—by our law-courts, police, charitable institutions, factory inspection, and so forth—should be obtained by man's free and joyous activity. Art should cause violence to be set aside.*

*And it is only art that can accomplish this.*

LEO TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, chap. xx.

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A FEW years ago one might have used the more familiar title DIGNITY AND IMPUDENCE to describe the artistic scene in England. There was a National Gallery, its walls majestic with the genius of past ages; there was a Royal Academy, defending, however inadequately, a tradition of rectitude; and barking in the face of these dignified institutions were all the revolutionaries and secessionists constituting "the modern movement". Then came universal war. Tradition retired into bomb-proof cellars and caves (it has a scarcity value); the modern movement, seemingly so secure behind a Maginot Line, was dispersed, to be heard of occasionally in Lisbon, Mexico City, Mozambique or the Isle of Man. What was left on the scene? Two exhibitions, which were held in London during the third year of the war, gave us a glimpse of "art among the ruins."

At Lancaster House (the London Museum) there was a brave attempt to rally the modern movement—"New Movements

in Art: Contemporary Work in England: An Exhibition of Recent Painting and Sculpture", to quote its full title. It will be remembered that before the war the modern movement was advancing in two separate and somewhat antagonistic columns, under the banners of constructivism and surrealism. Here (the surrealist column sadly depleted) they marched along together, showing work for the most part executed since the outbreak of the war. It would not, I think, be fair to judge the present position of surrealism from this exhibition—to that I will return presently. But so far as constructivism is concerned, let it be said at once that the column was seen to be advancing: never was there such a miracle of precision and harmony as Gabo's "Construction in Space—Spiral Theme" (1941): never had Ben Nicholson controlled his dimensional relationships with such a sure instinct: and there were various new recruits to the movement who showed that expansion and development are possible in this direction. What Hartley Ramsden, in an introductory note to the catalogue, called "the intrinsic merits of the work" was not in question: these artists, and others represented in the exhibition, "pre-eminently fulfil the requirements of an aesthetic standard". In doing that, and that alone, they anticipated any questioning of the social relevance of their work. Art is always socially relevant, or it is not art. In fulfilling the requirements of an aesthetic standard, a work of art is fulfilling the requirements of a social standard, for an aesthetic standard is an organic standard, a biologically functional standard, and you cannot make a button or a penknife, a bridge or a petrol-pump, a painting or a statue, without invoking this identical standard. Surrealism and constructivism, traditional values and revolutionary experiments, must meet on this same testing-ground of organic fitness. It is simply a question of survival—of the survival of art and of national survival, for if there is a division between a people and its art, it means that one or the other is no longer organically fit, organically vital, and will no longer survive.

That such a division now exists in this country was proved by the Forces Exhibition held about the same time at the

National Portrait Gallery This was a jury-free exhibition: the only qualification was membership of one of the civil defence or military forces. It consisted not only of drawings and paintings, but also of the miscellaneous products of "leisure moments"—carvings in wood and chalk, model engines and aeroplanes, pokerwork and pastiches of every kind. It was an exhibition typical of several that have been held since the war started, and it may be taken as a fair and uncensored representation of popular taste. In criticizing such an exhibition, one is always in the invidious position of the Superior Person, but even a worm could lift its head above such a level. What stretched before us was the sordid scum left by a receding civilization. Aesthetic criticism had no function there: it was an affair for the social pathologist. But to that science the art critic is inevitably driven day by day, and I doubt whether the war has left him with any other relevant basis. For at the other extreme, this art of pure intuition exemplified by the works of Mondrian, Gabo and Ben Nicholson—is this not also a social phenomenon, something left high and very dry by the same receding tide?

I ask this question with no certainty of giving a convincing answer, because before answering it I must make certain affirmations which will not be acceptable to those who will be inclined to agree with my answer. I must affirm in the first place that the art represented—to keep to a specific example—by Gabo's "Spiral Theme" is the highest point ever reached by the aesthetic intuition of man.<sup>1</sup> This form, hovering like

<sup>1</sup> This statement, which I reproduce as it first appeared in *Horizon*, has given rise to a good deal of misunderstanding. I am not asserting that a particular artist, Naum Gabo, is the greatest sculptor that has ever lived—greater than Phidias, Michael Angelo, or our contemporary, Mr. X, Y or Z. That is a decision I am modest enough to leave to history. I am saying that in my judgment a particular work of art represents the purest intuition of spatial relationships ever achieved in the history of art. This does not imply that such an intuition of such relationships constitutes the whole duty of the artist—indeed, the rest of the essay surely makes it clear that I am saying almost the opposite: namely, that the artist is called upon to mediate between the purity of his intuition and the veiled vision of his public.

a still but librating falcon between the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, is the crystallization of the purest sensibility for harmonious relationships: and whereas, in constructivist art generally, this crystallization is a mere planning of static relationships, here an axial system crystallizes energy itself. Creation is a much abused word, applied loosely to imitations and logical constructions: it is justified only for that absolute lyricism we call "pure poetry", for music, for certain branches of mathematics, and for constructivism in the plastic arts (which includes architecture). But even within this absolute world there is an hierarchy, and at the summit I would place this spatial construction of Gabo's.

In constructivism we have attained, after twenty-five centuries of irrelevant groping, the kind of art envisaged by Plato as the basic art—the art of pure relationships. Anyone who does not understand constructivism does not understand Plato's theory of art—and that, I venture to say, includes most philosophers and classical scholars. The utmost banality of imagination and lack of sensibility is shown precisely by those people who construe constructivist art as merely "decorative"—though personally I do not condone the derogatory use of this word: to say of a work of art that it is decorative is merely to admit that it is pleasing, and what pleases is good art.<sup>1</sup> I find a relief by Ben Nicholson very decorative in the right setting, just as, in its appropriate setting, I find a relief by Agostino di Duccio very decorative: decoration merely implies the accommodation of a work of art to its environment, and their failure

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ruskin (in *The Two Paths*): "There is no existing highest-order art but is decorative. The best sculpture yet produced has been the decoration of a temple front—the best painting, the decoration of a room. Raphael's best doing is merely the wall-colouring of a suite of apartments in the Vatican, and his cartoons were made for tapestries. Correggio's best doing is the decoration of two small church cupolas at Parma; Michael Angelo's, of a ceiling in the Pope's private chapel; Tintoret's, of a ceiling and side wall belonging to a charitable society at Venice; while Titian and Veronese threw out their noblest thoughts, not even on the inside, but on the outside of the common brick and plaster walls of Venice."

to accommodate themselves to any contemporary environment is precisely what is wrong with so many contemporary works of art. I do not exclude the possibility that it is the environment which should be changed.

Indeed, the environment is changing very rapidly: war is dissolving it, this war which is a symptom of the greatest social revolution since the fall of the Roman Empire. That is what I mean by my image of the receding tide, and the question we are asking is, not so much whether the tide will ever flow again—for that is the only presupposition which can justify any intellectual activity at all—but whether, when it does return to our shores, any of this art which we now call contemporary will float on its crest. In other words, is any of this art, any art visible anywhere to-day, prophetic of things to come?

Before I attempt to answer this question, let us glance at the scattered and repeatedly decimated ranks of the surrealists. I have already suggested that they should not be judged by the inadequate representation of their recent work which is nowadays to be seen in London. Where, then, shall we find the main body of this force which, only six years ago, was storming all our fortresses? Apparently in New York City. There the Grand Instigator (he has refused more pontifical titles) has landed from a refugee boat, and already established a consistory from which proceed the familiar encyclicals and bulls of excommunication. Salvador Dali, anagrammatically transformed into Avida Dollars, is smirched and obliterated with "black bile". Eluard is condemned for his collaboration in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, now reappearing in Paris under the sponsorship of the Nazis. The movement thus loses its most famous painter and its best poet. Breton can still count on Max Ernst, André Masson and Yves Tanguy, all now in America; and there is a motley access of new recruits, many of them, no doubt, embarrassing to the G.I. But Dali is the only painter who since the outbreak of war has shown any signs of vitality and of social relevance. He himself has described his new phase as "classical", but judging from repro-



ductions of his recent work,<sup>1</sup> "baroque" would be a better word, and neo-romantic better still. As for evidence of Dali's vitality, we find it in the ever-increasing fertility of his linear inventiveness, in the novelty and efficiency of his images. His social relevance consists in a violent and consistently maintained protest against the inhumanity of the machine age. This is evident in his titles alone—for example: "Debris of an automobile giving birth to a blind horse biting a telephone", which is not a clever joke, in conception or execution, but a tragic poetry. But equally with Breton we must recognize the paradox of Dali, which Breton describes in crueller terms. This artist is a typical product of the civilization he renounces and reviles. He has none of the integrity of a Jean Giono or an Eric Gill: he looks swell in a Mercedes-Benz. He is the idol of the socialites, the pet of expatriated aristocrats and dollar princesses. He cynically exploits the sensationalism incidental to his art. A movement which, whatever its faults, has never for a moment compromised with social inequality may well be excused for not tolerating such behaviour in its ranks. But the defections and exclusions which have characterized the movement since its beginnings have produced a very confused impression in the mind of the public, and a Third Manifesto, which is said to be in preparation, will need to be a very unequivocal document if this confusion is to be dissipated.

On his arrival in New York, Breton gave an interview which has been published in *View*.<sup>2</sup> It is a strange mixture of puerility and wisdom. It is perhaps understandable that after the stress of invasion, defeat, escape and exile, Breton should announce his "initiation into the mysteries of American butterflies"; but it is a little difficult to accept the invention of a *card game* which "proposes to throw an ideological bridge between two worlds" as an event of major significance in this time of Armageddon. But Breton does make one or two observations which show that surrealism may still have some contribution

<sup>1</sup> *Salvador Dali*, by James Thrall Soby (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941).

<sup>2</sup> Vol. i., Nos. 7-8, published in New York.

to make to the reintegration of our civilization. He insists, for example, that we are at the end of "the illusion of independence, I will even say of the transcendence, of the work of art". He attacks the *egocentrism* of the modern artist and poet, and reminds us that Lautréamont's precept, "Poetry should be made by all, not by one", remains one of the fundamental tenets of surrealism. He points out, and it is profoundly true, that the egocentrism of the artist brings with it "indifferentism" (the artist sets himself above the *mêlée*, believes himself entitled to an Olympian attitude), and this state in its turn entails stagnation, for the artist swiftly exhausts his individual resources and is only capable of sapless variations on a barren theme.

This point of view has been implicit in Breton's philosophy in the past, and it is thanks to Breton that surrealism has always had a sociological orientation. One therefore turns eagerly to the few words which he devoted to the future. In so far as they are expressed in general terms they are not disappointing. The following passage strikes me as being inspired by tragic experience and fundamental insight:

"In thumbing through the works of those who pretend to profit from France's defeat, I am struck by the briefness, not to say sterility, of their views. Conquerors and conquered appear to me headed for the same abyss if they do not instruct themselves before it is too late in the process which set them one against the other: in the course of such a process, the exhaustion of the economic causes of the conflict will but emphasize, in effect, the common misery of our contemporaries, which in the last analysis is doubtless of an ideological order: it is rationalism, a *closed rationalism*, which is killing the world; physical violence is unconsciously accepted, justified as the issue of mental passivity: in this game the least permeable thoughts—Cartesian, for instance—are those which turn out to be the quickest overthrown. This is so true, the 'giving up' so general, despair so great, that many ask if the salvation of man does not demand his

'disintellectualization' for the sake of a revaluation of his prime instincts. It is certain that as far as faith, honour and ideals are concerned, one sees everywhere to-day the *survival of the sign for the thing signified*. Faith, ideals, honour ask to be re-established on new bases: in the meantime all the rags which don't even cling to the body any more ought to be shaken."

Faith, honour, ideals—three years ago these would have been strange words on the lips of a superrealist, but we must respect Breton for his courage in uttering them, his realization that our tragic situation requires an affirmation of values which have for too long been abused by bourgeois moralists, but which, in their integrity, remain the basis of any natural human order. I will not quote Breton's indications of the specific activities necessary to achieve this revaluation of values—they might seem a little trivial against the wider vision. I am glad to see that they include a consideration of the significance of Gestalt psychology, for the application of this particular theory to the spheres of art and education promises to be more fruitful than any other system of psychology, psychoanalysis included.<sup>1</sup>

In agreeing with Breton that a system of closed rationalism is responsible for the present state of the world, and that a process of "disintellectualization" is necessary for our salvation, one must be careful to make certain distinctions. The protagonists of fascism have spoken in similar terms. It may be said that we all agree that what is necessary is a revaluation of man's "prime instincts". We disagree as to what constitutes these prime instincts. Or if we can agree on a scientific classification of these instincts, we may then disagree on the relative values to be placed on them. According to MacDougall, for example, the prime instincts are of flight, of repulsion, of curiosity, of pugnacity, of self-abasement and self-assertion, of reproduction (the sexual instinct), of acquisition, of construc-

<sup>1</sup> I give some evidence for this statement in *Education Through Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 1943), chap. iii. and *passim*.

tion, of feeding, together with the parental and the gregarious instincts. Here, obviously, there is plenty of room for disagreement, and any valuation of such diverse instincts must obviously be guided by an overriding philosophy—a general conception of the purpose of life or the destiny of man. Roughly speaking, the instincts can be divided into antagonistic pairs, and I believe that the distinction between all these pairs has its roots in the Oedipus complex. In the origins of love and hate we may seek the origins of self-abasement and self-assertion, of curiosity and repulsion, of gregariousness and pugnacity. On the one side we have instincts which are essentially egocentric, or phylocentric, and these are the instincts which the fascist philosophy exalts above all others. On the other side we have instincts of mutual aid and constructiveness which *should* be the instincts exalted by an anti-fascist or democratic philosophy. It is perfectly possible to distinguish certain instincts and encourage these at the expense of other instincts, and a philosophy which merely looks forward to the free play of any or all the basic instincts is a defeatism of the most fundamental kind. Better fascism than such indifferentism.

The closed rationalism to which Breton refers has not been a philosophy of indifferentism, though it has been largely a philosophy of unconscious assumptions. The most disastrous of these is the very general assumption that devotion to an intellectual concept is an adequate safeguard against the anti-social instincts. Such concepts are typical products of what is proudly claimed as "the scientific attitude" (though it is no longer characteristic of the most advanced scientists), and they are so prevalent and various that it needs a considerable effort of the will to be conscious of their existence. To mention only a few: the belief that every effect must have a cause; the belief that exact statements can be made about phenomenal events; the belief that feeling can be eliminated from thought; the belief in the real existence of entities like the state, the church, the working classes; the belief in the absolute nature of a particular code of morals; the belief in a *natural* distinction between right and wrong, good and bad, and in the whole

system of pedagogic and social discipline built up on such a distinction.

Fascism is the intellectualization of certain instincts which hitherto mankind has not thought worthy of intellectualization—those instincts of self-assertion, acquisition and pugnacity which can be given the emotional drive and cohesion of racial assertion. It is a further intellectual assumption that these instincts have a high survival value—an assumption which is not, I believe, supported by biological evidence.

It may seem that to speak, as Breton does, of reviving "faith, honour and ideals" is only to fall into the same trap, but that is to ignore the fact that these words indicate emotional attitudes and not intellectual concepts. These attitudes will be based on sensibility, above all on aesthetic sensibility. And this is where Gestalt psychology comes in, for it is being shown that in the very act of perception itself, and *a fortiori* in the higher organizations of experience known as sensation, memory, learning, thinking and reasoning, the aesthetic judgment is decisive. Our new ideals must be established on a recognition of this fundamental psychological fact, and this means that the whole of our educational and moral outlook must be reorientated away from intellection and towards sensibility. We must overthrow the tyranny of the concept.

It is against the necessity of this reconstruction of our modes of thought and behaviour that we must judge the relevance of the contemporary movements in art. In approaching constructivism from this new point of view it would at first sight seem highly suspect, for here is an art which dispenses with the image, and which might be described as essentially conceptual. And that indeed is the basis of the popular complaint about it—people say it is too austere, or too puritanical, or too intellectual for them. Strictly speaking, what the constructivists dispense with is the *pictorial* image, not the image itself: for a certain defined space, or area of colour, is no less an image than the image of a flower or a human face. The relevant question is whether the constructivist's use of images is sensible and organic, and I must assert that in the case of those artists who

really understand what they are doing (Gabo, for instance) it undoubtedly is. Nevertheless, there is a qualification to be made. I think it is perfectly fair to accuse these artists of ego-centrism, as Breton does. More particularly, they suffer from the illusion of the *transcendence* of the work of art. It is quite true that certain composers of music, certain mathematicians and logicians, certain metaphysicians, suffer from the same illusion. Whatever kind of secret or arcane activity the artist or the philosopher may pursue in his "laboratory"—and such activity is not only legitimate but necessary—he must then sacrifice his discoveries on the altar of the common good. The only real progress is communal progress, and that is why we must exalt the instinct of mutual aid above all other instincts (to the extent of recognizing that the community is the human race and not the intellectually isolated tribe). The work of art is only ratified in the organic ritual of life, and it is only in so far as the constructivist succeeds not only in constructing these platonic models of reality, but also in modifying the communal environment, that he acquires the full stature of the humanist. The artist is not even the mediator between the real and the ideal—that, again, is to overestimate his gifts. The artist, to quote a precept which does not differ materially from Lautréamont's, is not a special kind of man: every man is a special kind of artist.

These strictures apply no less forcibly to surrealism. When one has set aside the pathetic charlatanism which has always disfigured the movement, we are left with a very essential activity, one which the closed system of rationalism has always striven to repress. To pretend that the intimations of unconscious mental activity which we receive in dreams, and which find universal expression in religion, myth, folklore and ritual—to pretend that all these manifestations belong to the childhood of mankind and can be safely ignored by a rational civilization, is the supreme conceit of the human intellect. For that ignorant folly more than for anything else we suffer our present agony. In any reintegration of civilization, what the surrealists call the conquest of the irrational, but which might more subtly

be called the wooing of the irrational, must play a decisive part—in education, in drama, film, in every form of activity that invokes the pictorial image.

But finally let us realize that it is completely useless to indulge in these speculations on the purely ideological plane. I began by saying that the art critic has been compelled to become a social pathologist: but when he turns to the future he can only conceive it in terms of social reconstruction. These activities which we call art are social activities, they are communal activities. As such they are not *conscious* activities—no community ever said, "Now let us be artistic for a change". It might have said, "Now let us praise God" or "Now let us work" or "Now let us play". The art was not even a by-product of these activities: it was the substance of them. That is why it is not conceivable that a new civilization is possible without a social and economic revolution. Some people think that a change of heart is all that is needed. Hearts have been changing by the million in these last two years, but they still ache with insatiable longings. The mountains are moving. Faith, honour and ideals are hovering above the battlefields. But do not let us disguise the material immensity of our task. So much that we have practised as a diversion must be renounced: so much that we have valued for its refinement must be submerged. The world for many years to come will be at work, working overtime, working all the time, obsessed with work. It is our chance, for in the transformation of work we may see the organic growth of art.

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## Modern Art and French Decadence

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*We live in open conflict with the immediate world surrounding us. . . . In whatever direction I turn, this world presents the same appearance of cold and hostile unreasonableness, the same ceremonious exterior representing the sign's survival of the thing signified. All intellectual values are persecuted, all moral ideas in ruin, all the good things of life tainted with corruption, indistinguishable. The filth of money covers everything. Words like country, justice and duty have become meaningless to us. . . . We offer total resistance to whatever particular obligation such a world attempts to impose on us.*

ANDRÉ BRETON, *Position politique de l'art d'aujourd'hui* (1935).

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IT is often thought and sometimes said that modern art, so largely centred in Paris, should long ago have been recognized as a symptom of the rot that was spreading to the heart of the Third Republic. Now that it only remains to carry out an autopsy on the dead body, the symptoms no longer count: they can be dismissed as so much historical evidence of the process that was taking place, that has since run its course, and has now come to a definite end. If Hitler is defeated, if a Fourth Republic rises from the ruins of the Third, then, say these critics, a new art, completely different from the art of the period "entre deux guerres", will take shape and slowly establish itself.

There are so many sophisms and confusions in this very prevalent point of view that a somewhat pedantic analysis may perhaps be excused. Before we can discuss the problem, we ought to know, not only what is included under the term



"modern art", but also to what extent "modern art" is specifically French. We should also ask what is meant by the "decadence" of France, and to what extent such decadence is peculiarly French. Finally, we might also inquire into the credentials of those making the charge, and we might ask for some positive indication of the kind of art which they assume will take the place of "modern" art.

The first and most obvious qualification to be made is that the art usually described as "modern" art, particularly the art of the so-called "Paris School", is by no means exclusively French. To mention only a dozen names, the following painters who worked in Paris and there established their fame were all foreigners: Chagall, Chirico, Dali, Ernst, Gris, Miro, Modigliani, Mondrian, Pascin, Picasso, Soutine and Tchelitchew. Against this dozen one is hard put to name more than half a dozen purely French artists of equivalent significance for the modern movement—Braque, Derain, Léger, Masson, Matisse and Rouault, but who else?

It is easy to widen the charge—to admit that modern art as centred in Paris was thoroughly international, but at the same time to suggest that it was by that very fact typical of a decadence which was also international—the decadence of "the western democracies". It is also possible, for a Frenchman, to assert that the very admission and assimilation of so many foreign elements into the School of Paris was itself a sign of weakness—that a healthy art is, by contrast, a national and exclusive art. That would certainly be the view of the author of *Mein Kampf*, and is presumably the view to which Laval and the collaborationists must now conform.

If the charge is thus widened, it becomes a vast cultural question which we cannot limit to the sphere of modern art. We are, of course, witnessing the breakdown of a certain form of social organization—or lack of organization, for it is the competitive chaos of *laissez-faire* that has disintegrated. All forms of culture which are characteristic of small-scale capitalism may from this point of view be regarded as decadent; but equally, many forms of culture which are a protest against the values of

capitalist society must then be regarded as anti-decadent; and few cultural phenomena have been so defiantly recalcitrant to the values of capitalist society as modern art.

The critics, that is to say, cannot have it both ways. If by decadence they mean the moral and social values typical of the bourgeois society of the last thirty years, then modern art can only be regarded as a reaction against these values. Even surrealism, which the opponents of modern art regard as a sort of putrescent shimmer on the decayed body of modern culture, is essentially a protest, and a very moral protest, against the unreality of the conventions which passed for life—in particular, against the inhumanity of the machine age. In this respect, Dali, as he himself would admit, is merely the last and the most logical of the Pre-Raphaelites.

But if the critics assert that modern art itself is decadent, then they must be prepared to defend the moral and aesthetic conventions against which that art was a protest. And in the circumstances, their defence must be organized among the ruins of the social structure which embodied those conventions.

The argument on this universal level is endless, and it can only enhance the significance of a phenomenon which, whatever aesthetic judgment we pass on it, has its counterpart in the catastrophic history of our time. Whatever aesthetic judgment history itself passes on the art of our time, it is bound to take *as representative*, not the tame and conformist products of the academies, but post-impressionism, cubism, constructivism and surrealism. For good or evil these movements have determined the course of contemporary art and of its literary and ideological concepts, and they cannot be expunged from any objective study of our time. This is perhaps only the triumph of the regicide and the assassin: you may despise and condemn such agents of history, but you cannot repress their names or deeds.

But it is more profitable to discuss this problem within the specified limits of one country and one event: the fall of France. There may still be people who attribute this disaster to strategic errors or mere mischance, but surely all the evidence, and there is more of it than was presented at the Riom trials,

makes it quite clear that France was suffering (as, indeed, Great Britain and the United States also suffer) from a breakdown of social institutions, accompanied by political corruption and national disintegration. It is still possible to assert, in so far as this was a kind of disease of democracy, that it was local and not endemic. Democracy had become infected with a virus that had weakened its pulse, brought its blood to one coagulated centre, and paralysed its nerves and limbs. The disease can be scientifically diagnosed in the terms of capitalist accumulation, scarcity economics, production for profit, insecurity neurosis, etc. The framework of democratic theory remains unaffected: for democracy, in theory, is merely the assertion of human values, such as brotherly love, mutual aid, equality and freedom. A system which does not secure these values is *ipso facto* not democratic.

Certain critics of modern art would accept some such political diagnosis and then go on to assert that the nature of modern art has been determined by the economics of the capitalist era. It may be true that a phenomenon like the centralization of the movement in Paris was due to economic factors; and certainly the monetary valuation of works of art has been determined by the mechanism of scarcity economics and the profit motive. One could point out a hundred ways in which the economic system has affected and controlled the art market. But this does not prove that the art is representative of the system which controls it. Capitalist motives have not affected, consciously or unconsciously, the stylistic development of artists so distinct in kind and appeal as Picasso, Rouault, Matisse and Dali. The artists, one might say, have consistently tweaked the noses of their wealthy patrons, and pursued courses which have dismayed, not only their patrons, but the dealers who mediated between patron and artist.

Let us now confine ourselves to certain representative French artists. They seem to me to follow three or perhaps four clear trends. There are in the first place painters like Vuillard and Bonnard who continue the impressionist tradition in an exquisitely prolonged diminuendo. They, if any modern French

artists, might be described as decadent in the literal sense of the word, because they have refined a particular vision of the world beyond its period of social relevance. Impressionism is the art of a world that had just discovered the significance of movement, but not yet invented the moving picture; a world that was still playing with the science of colour as with a newly discovered secret; and above all, a world that still lived intimately, behind heavy curtains, under shaded lamps. Matisse and Derain, who represent a second though a subsidiary trend, had discovered how to live in sunlit houses, to travel in motor-cars, to assimilate speed. They returned to a static world, or a world dominated by musical rhythm, and gave expression to the new nostalgia: the peaceful landscape, the liberation of colour, the childlike vision, the integral pattern. That was not a plunge into decadence: rather a *redressement*, an assertion of the individual will, the vitality of bodily sensation, the primacy of the human and the subjective over the material and the objective. There is a certain moral grandeur about the life-work of a painter like Matisse, or a sculptor like Maillol. But if we can say as much for Matisse or Maillol, what shall we say for Georges Rouault, who, in our present distressful perspective, has gained so much in spiritual significance? We were apt, in the years of cleverness, to discount too much for his obstinate medievalism, his Christian passion, his narrow undeviating expressionism. But how massively his art stands now against the background of defeatism and abdication! The France in which a Rouault could work and find appreciation was not a decadent France: rather it was the France of Giono and Bernanos, of the eternal solidity of the peasant and of the conscience that was still free and catholic.

Two other painters I would mention because as personalities they are so typically French—massive clear-eyed Normans whose physique at any rate never suggested decadence: Léger and Braque. They represent the extremes of modernism—or shall we add Masson to make sure of including *surréalisme*? Léger's precise architectonic art, so strong in organization, so powerful and direct in colour, has as much moral integrity as

Rouault's art, though infinitely less spirituality: it omits, not merely the "numinous" of the theologians, but even the pre-conscious of the psychologists. But if it is limited to the organization of sensation, and omits certain aspects of intuition and feeling, it is none the less a very positive art, far from any suggestion of weakness or decadence. It will remain standing even if the political structure never rises round it again.

So, too, will the art of Braque. Not all of it, because he has been more eclectic, more impressionable, less integral. There have been times when he was bored with the social scene, and "doodled" while he stared hopelessly into the future. But his best work—the pre-1914 cubist paintings, the *nature mortes* of the 'twenties, the mythical figures of the 'thirties—these are all stages in that "dissolution of reality" which Carl Einstein, in his extraordinary essay on Braque,<sup>1</sup> saw as his positive service to the moral reintegration of the age.

It is from the same point of view that we should consider the social aspect of superrealism. Superrealists have always declared, from the very beginning of the movement, that it had taken upon itself the duty of destroying the aesthetic and moral conventions of contemporary bourgeois civilization. If, as the turn of events has proved, that civilization was rotten, and ready to disintegrate, then superrealism can only be praised for its sanitary function. I repeat: the critics of modern art cannot have it both ways: either they must defend bourgeois civilization and try to re-establish its social and economic conventions, or they must admit the correctness and prescience of the superrealist movement. I would like to emphasize this *prescience*. Along with certain psychoanalysts—particularly Jung—the superrealists again and again warned the world of the coming catastrophe, and the implications of the shape their warnings took, in the paintings of Max Ernst, Dali, René Magritte and others, was plainly moral—the most moral and minatory art since the Middle Ages. Change your way of life, your conception of reality, or otherwise the end of the world is upon you. Like Isaiah and Ezekiel of old, they preached

<sup>1</sup> *Editions des Chroniques du Jour* (Paris, 1934).

with destructive fury, eager to hasten the revolution which was, and still is, the only alternative to the end of our civilization.

If we look back on the ten years preceding the outbreak of the war, the years of steep incline into disaster, then the significant figures in the French scene are not the Gides and Valéry's, or any competitor for the laurels of the Académie, but Giono, the peasant-anarchist, Bernanos, the integral Christian, and Breton, the surrealist. These are the significant figures, and they are positive figures, creative because destructive, moral in their revolt against contemporary values. Apparently they are disparate figures, working in different spheres, along different levels of human consciousness; but in the total sphere of that consciousness their orbits meet, and include within their points of contact nothing that is compromising, reactionary or decadent; but contain everything that is positive, revolutionary, and creative of a new and enduring world.

It will be many years before a just and final estimate of the culture of the early twentieth century becomes possible, but we can already assert, on principles which we derive from the total aspect of history, that growth and form, birth, maturation and decadence, are dynamic processes. The vigour of an epoch is not measured by its stability, which may be deathly, but by its movement, its display of energy. When a civilization becomes moribund, or paralysed by material and economic factors, then the first stirrings of a rebirth will inevitably take the form of an attack on the repressive environment. The shell must be broken before new wings can take the air. The phoenix rises from a fire, beauty from ashes.

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## A Question of Life or Death

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*I implore you to tell me how a people that has so many philosophers can have so little taste. . . .*

VOLTAIRE in a letter to the Cardinal de Bernis.

*You seem to be surprised that philosophy, enlightening the mind and rectifying ideas, should have so little influence on the taste of a nation. You are quite right: and yet you will have observed that manners have even more empire over taste than have the sciences. It seems to me that in the matter of art and of literature, the progress of taste is more dependent on the spirit of society than on the philosophic spirit.*

The CARDINAL DE BERNIS in a letter to Voltaire. Cited by Delacroix, *Journal*, April 9, 1858.

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THE symptoms of decadence as they reveal themselves in the art of a country are indifference, vanity and servitude. Indifference is the absence of appreciation: it is the general attitude towards the arts in England to-day. It is true that we still have a few patrons who carry on a bygone system, but they are neither numerous enough nor influential enough to affect the general body of art. It is significant, too, that they confine themselves to the arts of painting and music, whose products can be used for their personal profit—for the decoration of their houses or the amusement of their friends. I know of no modern patrons of poetry, or of literature of any kind. A poet might sell his autograph for sixpence at a charity bazaar, but it would be a poor sort of bazaar that could not procure the far

more valuable services of a racing motorist, a county cricketer or a film star.

Indifference is endemic. It is a disease which has spread through our whole civilization, and which is a symptom of a lowered vitality. The sensibilities are dulled and the average human being no longer cares to feel the keen edge of life, to have freshness in vision or zest and savour in the senses. He prefers to face life in the armour of boredom and cynicism, fending off despair with the brazen shield of dissipation. If he is rich he can command amusements which soothe his exacerbated nerves without engaging his mind or intriguing his imagination; if he is poor he will plunge into the cheap make-believe world of Hollywood where he can enjoy vicariously the glittering life of the rich; or he will gamble his ill-spared shillings on the football pools in the expectation of one day being able to indulge in his own hectic spending. But rich or poor, it is the same fever to escape from reality—above all, from art, which is the mirror in which the reality of life is accentuated.

There is one exception to this rule: those people who think they can subdue the artist and use his works for their own profit. The time has gone by in which any credit is to be obtained by the direct patronage of art; no one, for the sake of a dedication, would pay a poet to write an epic. But certain kinds of art can be brought within the orbit of the commercial system—that is to say, they can be given an artificial scarcity value and put on the market. This applies above all to movable objects like paintings. But the process by which a painting becomes a market commodity is not a simple one. The demand must be created and the supply must be restricted. I do not want to suggest that the demand can be created irrespective of merit; but granted the merit, it must be exploited, and it can only be exploited by snobbish means. A painter might paint fifty pictures a year and make quite a good living by selling them at £20 apiece to a wide anonymous public; but in that way he would never become famous in his lifetime. By devious ways it has to be suggested that a few select people should pay



£1000 for the rare privilege of possessing one of Mr. X's canvases. And such is the cunning and efficiency of the art trade that this can be done. But then consider the position of this lucky and perhaps deserving artist. His pictures pass from his studio to the dealer's rack; from this emporium they are doled out to the public at a rate which will not flood the market. They are priced as high as the audacious dealer dares, and bought by someone rich enough to pay this exorbitant sum. A situation has been created in which the work of art is bought, not for its intrinsic value as a work of art, but simply because it is a commercial rarity the possession of which will reflect credit on the owner.

In such a situation there is no organic relation between the artist and the public; there is no real contact, no give and take of expression and appreciation. The artist is working in a closed circuit, and need never break it.

The danger in this situation is not that the artist makes a good living and is able to live a life of luxury. Good artists in the past, such as Rubens, have lived like princes and no harm has come to their art. But Rubens lived in direct contact with his public; he dealt, as it were, across his own counter. The modern artist is as remote as the mines of Anaconda or Rio Tinto, and subject to the same quotations and speculations. And very much the same motives govern both markets. The prices of pictures are not quoted in the Stock Exchange lists, but they have their fluctuations on Vanity Fair. So have most of the commodities of the art market. The publisher must exploit vanity for his books, the impresario for his music and the producer for his plays. The only alternative is to substitute entertainment for art. The public will pay for entertainment; the private person for the privilege of possessing something unique.

Vanity in the patron of art leads to servitude in the artist. A servile mind is a mind that has committed moral suicide. Art is independence—independence of vision, directness of expression, spiritual detachment. A good deal of nonsense has been written about the anonymous artists of the Middle

Ages. If we do not know the names of the architects of our cathedrals or of the sculptors and painters who decorated them, it is simply because the artists of that period did not have the benefit of a modern publicity service; the records have perished: the art remains, universal and therefore impersonal in its appeal, but none the less the creation of individual minds. If Adam Lock, the thirteenth-century architect of Wells Cathedral, or William Wynford, the fourteenth-century architect of Winchester, are not so well known as Wren or Nash, it is not that they were inferior as architects, or in any sense less individual. We can affirm it as a simple fact that from the earliest appearance of art in prehistoric times until the present day, art has been the creation of individual minds, reacting freely to their environment, expressing and interpreting the common will, but deriving the essence and the vitality of their works from the make and manner of their own personalities.

It is because art is such an individual act of creation that it demands freedom for its perfection—freedom of mind and freedom of person. It is often objected to this point of view that some of the greatest works of art were produced in times of stress—that the *Divine Comedy* was written by a political exile, and *Don Quixote* in a jail. But if we look more closely into these cases, we find that Dante approximates to a distinguished political exile of to-day spending his time as a guest in various country-houses—not bad conditions for poetic activity; and as for Cervantes, prison was a peaceful and care-free interval in a life of poverty and persecution.

The truth is rather that there is scarcely a great artist in the history of modern civilization whose work would not have been incomparably greater if he could have lived in spiritual freedom and economic security. There exists a fragment of a letter from Leonardo da Vinci to his patron, Ludovic Sforza. "I regret very much", he wrote, "that the fact of my having to gain my living should have prevented me from continuing the work which your Highness has intrusted to me: but I hope that within a short time I shall have earned so much as

to be able with a tranquil mind to satisfy your Excellency, to whom I commend myself. If your Excellency thought that I had money, you were deceived, for I have had six mouths to feed for thirty-six months, and I have had fifty ducats." This man had perhaps the greatest intellect that the human race has ever produced: he was hindered and reduced to impotency for the want of a few ducats.

The economic servitude of the artist is one cause of the death of art, and there is no age which can escape the shame of keeping its artists in poverty. But poverty is nevertheless an experience from which the artist can derive some benefit, such as a sympathetic understanding of the sufferings of humanity and a knowledge of the behaviour of men in adversity. A certain apprenticeship in humility is perhaps essential to the development of the artist. But there is no sanction at all for that other form of servitude which springs from intolerance. It is understandable that politicians should resent the power of effective expression which is in the hands of the artist, and that they should want to control this power in the interests of a system of government or a policy. It is understandable that a church should want to use this power to propagate its dogmas. Art is not inconsistent with such propaganda, so long as the artist is consenting, or believing, or sympathizing. But that the further step should be taken, and that art should be controlled by politicians in its own supposed interests, is simply catastrophic. Art may suffer determination of aim, and still survive in however debased a form; but that the artist should submit to a dictation of method is inconceivable. In the very act of submission he ceases to be an artist. To declare that the art of a country should be of a particular style—it is always a style from the past—or of a particular content—heroic, realist, moral or eugenic: such action immediately inhibits the artist, and art comes to a sudden end. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that no considerable works of art have emerged from Russia since about 1924, nor from Germany since 1933.

It is not that art is incompatible with revolution—far from it. Nor do I suggest that art has no specific part to play in a

revolutionary struggle. I am not defending art for art's sake; I am not arguing that art should remain "pure"—such art is generally the art of the reactionary dilettanti. Art as I have defined it is so intimately linked to the vital forces of life that it carries society towards ever new manifestations of that life. Art, in its full and free subjective action, is the one essentially revolutionary force with which man is endowed. Art is revolution, and art can best serve revolution by remaining true to itself.

Art's wider significance is biological. It is no idle play of surplus energies, no mere lustre on the hard surface of reality, as materialists have tended to argue. It springs from the centre of life. It is the finest tone of our vitality, the reflexion of harmonious form, the very echo of the organic rhythm of the universe. A nation without art may achieve external order; it may accumulate wealth and exercise power. But if it is without aesthetic sensibility, these things will perish as if from their own weight, their lack of balance and proportion. Perhaps no civilization is destined to survive many centuries, but when a civilization is stricken, we shall then notice, along with a declining birth-rate and an increasing debt, first the censure of originality in art and then art's complete subservience and defeat. The decline and fall of a civilization naturally involve the decline and fall of its art; but it is a mistake to assume that art perishes simply because its social foundations are withdrawn. The foundations are the art, and they perish from a rot which has invaded the whole structure. Psychologists say that our minds contain two contrary impulses—the will to live and the will to die; and that the curve of life is the result of the contest between them. So with a civilization. It has a will to live and a will to die; and the highest expression of its will to live is a free and original art.

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## The Collective Patron

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*One of the reasons why I am out of employment now, why I have been out of employment for years, is simply that I have other ideas than the gentlemen who give the places to men who think as they do.*

VINCENT VAN GOGH, Letter to his Brother Theo,  
July 1880.

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I HAVE suggested, on an earlier page, that the artist should be abolished: art is not a separate "profession", but a quality inherent in all work well done. I have also implied that in a healthy society the citizens are not too conscious of their "culture": they create works of art automatically, instinctively. At the same time I admitted that there were certain "glittering pinnacles" which pierce through the routine of daily activity, to achieve a timeless universality.

In order that these sun-capped peaks shall emerge in the course of a nation's evolution, it is necessary that, on the basis of a general diffusion of what we call "taste", by which word I mean a productive industry which is naturally appropriate and beautiful, a continuous process of comparison should take place. It is the consumer's attitude to his own and his fellow-worker's product. It is the *critical* attitude, and it produces a progressive awareness of formal quality in human artefacts.

If I am asked whether this is a necessary or a healthy activity, I hesitate to be positive. Self-consciousness in art is the beginning of sophistication, and if it means a loss of social consciousness in the individual, a sense of separateness, I am sure it is the beginning of the end, the first symptom of social decadence.

But criticism can be group criticism: it can be the social awareness of social relevance, and in that sense it is a necessary function. It is the sense of quality, the recognition of achievement. It is the collective appreciation and promotion of art.

In a vital community, art is promoted in three ways: socially by appreciation, economically by patronage, and essentially by liberty. These are the three necessities upon which the life of art depends: appreciation, patronage and liberty.

We need not dwell on the need for appreciation. There have been artists who have lived and worked without immediate appreciation, but they have been inspired by conviction—by a fanatical faith in the eventual recognition of their genius. Artists like Van Gogh have so much confidence in themselves that they are content to work for a posterity they will never see. But such individuals are very rare. Even the most neglected artists usually have a small circle of devoted admirers, and even two or three spirits of rare perception are sufficient to confirm an artist in his activity. Indeed, there is every reason to distrust more than a moderate success in one's own time: every great artist being under the necessity, as Coleridge said, of creating the public taste by which he is appreciated—a process that takes time. The essential thing is for the artist to have the sense of an audience: to feel that his voice is not echoing in an empty room, with no response. In every great artist's development there is an imperceptible process of give and take, of appeal and response, of trial and experiment—and he cannot experiment on a dead and unresponsive body.

The second necessity for the life of art is *patronage*: a word which I use deliberately. There are two ways in which an artist can live: by selling his art to the public, or by receiving an income which is independent of his artistic activity. In spite of everything that has been said to the contrary, I am convinced that independence is the only proper basis for any kind of creative activity. I do not wish to revive the private patronage which became current in this country during the seventeenth century and persisted until more recent times:

that had its obvious abuses, and was in fact a form of servile dependence, however enlightened the patron might be. But, unsatisfactory as such personal bonds might be, the commercialization of art which followed was much more disastrous, and I can think of no artist—certainly not artists like Scott or Balzac or Dickens—who would not have been better artists if they had been relieved of insistent financial pressure. It is a fact of no small significance that a great majority of the painters, poets and composers who have risen to fame since the disappearance of the patronage system have been men with independent incomes derived from inherited estates. Or, like Wordsworth, they have been in possession of official sinecures during a considerable part of their lives.

It is instructive to observe how the problem of the artist's income has been dealt with in a new society like the socialist republic of Russia. The evidence published by various interested parties is conflicting, but briefly we may say that the arts are divorced from the industries (a sculptor, for example, belonging to an artist's "collective" or union, and not to the same union as a stonemason) and organized on parallel lines. There exist co-operative unions for all the various branches of art, with head offices in Moscow and branches all over the U.S.S.R. Any artist, on producing evidence of his talent and of his serious intentions, may join the appropriate co-operative. When he has been properly admitted, he then signs a contract of a year's duration. In this contract the artist binds himself to hand over to the co-operative his year's work, and the co-operative in return undertakes to pay him a monthly sum—a minimum of 500 roubles for unknown artists, rising to 2000 roubles or more for artists of established reputation.

The co-operatives do not seem to have any difficulty in disposing of the works supplied by the artists: "fine" art, in that vast republic of 180 million souls, is a scarcity commodity. The difficulty is the artist. He may not produce the quantity of work specified in the contract. For a time the co-operative may allow him to continue in its debt, but finally there is a crisis and the artist is expelled. On the other hand, if the

artist produces more than he promised, and the co-operative disposes of it all, he is entitled to his share of the surplus.

This system is admittedly far in advance of anything existing in capitalist countries, but from the point of view of the artist it has two serious defects. It puts a premium on productivity or facility, and it allows the co-operative, and the Central Art Committee which controls all the co-operatives, to dictate the kind of art that should or must be produced. The first objection might not seem very grave to the public at large, whose work is necessarily of a routine character. And admittedly there are many artists—perhaps the great majority—who can turn out their paintings by the square foot and their books by the page with the regularity of a shoemaker or a riveter. But the exceptional artist—and it is the exceptions that we are considering—can conform to no such measured pace. He is dependent on endless experimentation, on a slow process of gestation, and on fitful inspiration. He works by intuition and not by rule of thumb; he may need five years to produce a single masterpiece; short periods of creative activity are followed by long periods of equally creative inactivity. Art divorced from industry is no longer an industry, and cannot be governed by the principles of industrial organization.

But serious as this defect is, it is not so harmful as the discipline and censorship which such a form of organization permits and even implies. The co-operatives are in effect a part of the state machine, and a close control of them is exercised by the Central Art Committee, which is the equivalent of a Ministry of Fine Art working under the direction of the central government. Now, art is too closely related to education and propaganda to be neglected by a totalitarian régime, and the control of art in Russia has in consequence become increasingly strict, with fatal results. I am not referring to anything that might be excused as political censorship. Art has been condemned and artists imprisoned or exiled for purely stylistic reasons. There are Russian artists here in England who have had to leave their country, not because they were politically suspect, but merely because they would not paint in a naturalistic style. There are



architects who have been exiled because they refused to build in the neo-classical style of their grandfathers. Poets and composers are in disgrace because their verses do not rhyme or their tunes are not melodic. And for every one of these artists who are known to us we may be sure there are many who are mute because they refuse to submit to the indignity of all such restrictions made in the interests of vulgarity or dogmatism.

Patronage of some kind is essential, but it is only tolerable when accompanied by liberty. Patronage need not imply servitude. True patronage is a tribute to the genius of the artist and a recognition of the fact that the quality we call art cannot be assessed in economic terms. I call it a tribute, but this does not imply that it should be a charity. The demand for art, when organized, will be quite capable of supporting the artists. The Russian system, in its broad outlines, is essentially the right system. Free it from bureaucratic regimentation, free it from political intolerance, and then the artist's collective could ensure, not only a basic livelihood for all its members, but liberty to work at an individual pace and in an individual manner.

Art, in its collective aspect, would become the patron of individual artists. The evil of the old system of patronage sprang from the individualism of the patron. It was the patron's vanity, his desire to use the artist for his own glorification, or for the defence of his interests, which demoralized the artist. No artist ever suffered from the gift of a sinecure or the grant of a pension. But art itself was in danger because its economic basis was dependent on the will of an individual who was not himself an artist, and who had not necessarily any understanding of art.

An artist's collective has an historical analogy in the craft guilds of the Middle Ages, but admittedly, in the modern sense and under modern conditions, it is an untried experiment. But I see no alternative which would give the artist economic independence and liberty of action. The true solution of this problem, as I have insisted again and again in my writings, is the reintegration of art and work, so that art becomes simply

the qualitative aspect of all that is made and done and said in a community. Apart from this, there is only the possibility that the artist of the future should earn his living in some quite different vocation and practise his art in his hours of leisure. That is, of course, the condition under which many artists work to-day. But what sort of conception of art have we if we imagine that it can be produced by tired workers at week-ends? Art in any worthy sense is not only arduous, but demands a continuous application of the faculties; it requires the full disposition of the whole man, if not in actual labour, then in observation, contemplation and passive awareness. Art is a full-time job.

The reintegration of art and work, as I have defined it elsewhere in this book, would absorb most of our "professional" artists: the architect, the sculptor, the painter, the composer, each has a natural niche in the industrial hierarchy. Only the poet is excluded—the poet in the widest sense, the seer or visionary in any medium of expression. The "divine literatus" is a social outcast. He is the product of his "contrary experience".

If the liberty of the artist could be guaranteed by his guild, then he would, of course, have corresponding duties, a responsibility not only to his guild, but also to the community as a whole. But such duties are too intangible to be defined. Or else, they can be defined with simplicity and truth as nothing but the duty to be a good artist. It is sometimes said that the artist is under an obligation to make himself understood. But understood by whom? By "the man in the street"? Obviously not, otherwise we should have to condemn the greater part of our poetry and music. By a select few? Possibly, but only if that few remain hidden and anonymous; for a coherent few becomes a sect or clique, and their demands revive all the abuses of the old system of patronage. The artist is really responsible to a body more universal and remote: to humanity in its widest consciousness and finest power of perception. There are many artists of talent, but greatness lies precisely in this power to realize and even to forecast the imaginative needs of mankind.

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## The Freedom of the Artist

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*The bourgeois believes that liberty consists in absence of social organization; that liberty is a negative quality, a deprivation of existing obstacles to it; and not a positive quality, the reward of endeavour and wisdom. . . . Because of this basic fallacy this type of intellectual always tries to cure positive social evils, such as wars, by negative individual actions, such as non-co-operation, passive resistance or conscientious objection. This is because he cannot rid himself of the assumption that the individual is free. But we have shown that the individual is never free. He can only obtain freedom by social co-operation. He can only do what he wants by using social forces. . . . But in order to use social relations he must understand them. He must become conscious of the laws of society, just as, if he wants to lever up a stone, he must know the laws of levers.*

CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL, *Studies in a Dying Culture* (1938).

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ONE of the most obvious generalizations from the history of art is to the effect that at various times in the past different conceptions of the technique and content of art have prevailed, but that in their time these conceptions were always regarded as the normal mode of expression. To the degree that we are aware of this relativity in standards, we shall accept as perfectly natural and inevitable that the peculiar social conditions of our time should give rise to an original style of art. That possibility being granted, we might further regard it as also perfectly natural that there should be a time-lag in public appreciation, and that the new form of art should find itself in opposition to

the traditions inherited from the immediate past. But the special character of the contemporary situation is that there is not an art which we can call specifically modern, but at least four styles of art which make that claim. We have in the first place the specifically modern styles best defined by the words *superrealism* and *constructivism*, styles which, the more logically they develop, the more incompatible with one another they seem to become. But to complete the picture of art to-day, we must be prepared to admit the independent existence of two further styles: *realism* and *expressionism*.

By realism we mean that style of art which attempts to represent the objective reality of the external world. The word "realism" can be used in a narrower sense, to indicate a style of art which concentrates on scenes of low life, or on morbid or horrible details, but that is not a very logical use of the term. Realism is also confused with naturalism, but that word either means the same as realism, and is therefore unnecessary, or it indicates something more restricted than realism—that aspect of the world we habitually identify as "nature": trees, flowers, landscape generally, and even human nature. In spite of its ambiguity, realism is the right philosophical term to describe that whole school of art, in literature as well as in the plastic arts, which endeavours to give an exact representation of the external or objective world, or rather, of select details of that world.

Expressionism, too, is based on the observation of the external world, but it no longer pretends to be objective. It admits that the recording instrument, the artist, is a sensitive or subjective element, and it suggests that his view of the world is necessarily affected by his emotional reaction to what he sees. The expressionist artist may believe in the existence of an objective reality; but that reality is merely hypothetical, and the real reality, the only reality which the artist can faithfully record, is the sensation which is provoked in his mind by this external agent. A camera, he would say, may conceivably record the external features of Mr. Winston Churchill; but that is not the Winston Churchill I apprehend with my senses, nor has it

any correspondence to the emotional reactions which take place whenever I become aware of Mr. Churchill. If I paint what I see and at the same time feel, it will not be like a camera portrait of Mr. Churchill: it will be more like what would be called a caricature of him. It will, in short, be expressive rather than realistic.

If we divide art into these four groups then I think we shall find that they cover all the manifestations of artistic activity taking place to-day, and indeed, all the manifestations that have ever taken place in the past. The only peculiarity about the situation to-day is that all four types of artistic activity tend to take place at the same time, whereas in the past the emphasis has tended to be on one or other of the four types to the exclusion of the other three. What I think it is still necessary to realize is that all four types of activity are natural, and that indeed they correspond exactly to four types of mental activity which have a long traditional history, and which have been revived by modern psychology.

The human mind is not a region which can be charted with any exactitude, but psychologists have resorted to certain schematic representations which help to give us a clear picture of what is an obscure and complex reality. The particular formula which we should find most useful is that elaborated in great detail by Jung, but actually, as Jung acknowledges in his book on *Psychological Types*, the main areas and boundaries have been gradually evolved by the general science of psychology. Here<sup>1</sup> we do not need to go much beyond these accepted commonplaces, which make a distinction between four primary functions of the mind—four activities or faculties which co-exist in the mind of every individual and which we call *Thinking, Feeling, Intuition and Sensation*.

Now, though it is conceivable that the mind is capable of states of pure thought, pure feeling, pure sensation and pure intuition, most of its activity is of a mixed nature, and takes place between these cardinal points. Thus, thought passes

<sup>1</sup> I have discussed the subject in greater detail in *Education Through Art*, especially in a chapter on "Temperament and Expression".

imperceptibly into intuitive thought, which we call speculation, then through intuition into intuitive feeling, through feeling into sensory feeling, through sensation into sensory thinking (or what we call empirical thought), and so back to thinking. But in any individual, one or the other of the four primary functions of the mind will tend to predominate, and according to Jung and other psychologists, what we call the character of the individual—the psychological type to which he belongs—is determined by the particular balance established between the four primary functions.

The plastic arts are, of course, all expressed through the medium of sensation, but *what* they express is the mind or personality of the artist. If we can distinguish four types of mental personality, there should logically be four corresponding types of art—and we have already found that there are four such types. It only remains to identify each type of art with its corresponding psychological function, and this does not present any difficulty. A detailed demonstration of these correspondences involves psychological technicalities which would be out of place in the present general essay, and which in any case are of purely schematic value. For it must be repeatedly emphasized that there are no exact limits between these divisions of mind and of art: they merge into one another, and between realism and constructivism, between constructivism and superrealism, between superrealism and expressionism, and finally between expressionism and realism, we get intermediate types of art which fuse thought and intuition, intuition and feeling, feeling and sensation, or sensation and thought.

I have only introduced this psychological comparison to make clear what I consider to be the most striking achievement of modern art—an achievement of which it is not yet conscious. Modern art has broken through the artificial boundaries and limitations which we owe to a one-sided and prejudiced view of the human personality. Modern psychology has shown that the mind of man is complex; that it is a balance of forces—of various impulses or unconscious “drives”, and that the various psychological types into which human beings can be divided

are determined by the predominance of one particular impulse or group of impulses. What I am saying, therefore, is simple enough and should always have been admitted: namely, that there is not one type of art to which all types of men should conform, but as many types of art as there are types of men; and that the categories into which we divide art should naturally correspond to the categories into which we divide men. This statement does not exclude the philosophical problem of *value*, to which I shall come presently; I am not suggesting that there is no possibility of making judgments about the various types of art, or of man. But from a scientific point of view, each type of art is the legitimate expression of a type of mental personality. From a scientific point of view, that is to say, realism and idealism, expressionism and constructivism are all natural phenomena, and the warring schools into which men divide themselves are merely the products of ignorance and prejudice. A true eclecticism can and should enjoy all the manifestations of the creative impulse in man.

If we could imagine a society in which each individual pursued his course in independence, happily producing what he wished to produce without interference from his neighbours, then in such a community each type of artist could express himself in the manner which he found most apt. Constructivists and superrealists, realists and expressionists, could live and work side by side in perfect amity. I do not suggest that such a community of individuals is too idealistic to contemplate; it is, in fact, the ideal towards which we should aim. But actually, here and now, we live in communities of a very different character. All the various societies which together make up modern civilization are in fact highly organized and complex, and according to their type of organization they encourage a particular type of art, or even discourage all types of art.

Modern societies can be divided into two general types—democratic and totalitarian. It is true that you might find, in India or the Pacific Ocean, a small state which still represented a different conception of society—feudal or communist—but such societies are vestigial. The general drift of modern

economic forces compels society in general to adopt one or other of the complex and highly organized forms which we call democratic and totalitarian. In theory, the distinction between these two forms is very sharp—indeed, it is so irreconcilable that it has led to the present deathly conflict. In practice, and particularly under the stress of war, there is a tendency for the two forms to approximate—the totalitarian making concessions of liberty in the interests of morale, the democratic elaborating a centralized control in the interests of immediate efficiency and power. In the present context therefore, it would be better to abandon the ambiguous word “democracy” and to present the contrast in irreconcilable terms—totalitarian and libertarian.

The broad distinction between the totalitarian and the libertarian state is that society in the former is a planned organization to which all the constituent individuals or units are forcibly subordinated, whilst in the latter, society is the result of the free co-operation of individuals for their common benefit. The totalitarian state has the apparent advantage of efficiency, but by killing individual initiative it tends to make the state an inelastic, inorganic and anti-vital machine. The libertarian state is haphazard, apparently inefficient, certainly exasperating to men with tidy minds, but we claim that, like nature itself, though wasteful, it does live and let live, and that, above all, it allows for the development of individual sensibility and intelligence.

Accepting these facts, what we would then *a priori* expect does in fact occur. The two most completely totalitarian states, Germany and Russia, are precisely the states in which the realistic style in art not merely prevails, but *is made* to prevail. It is the official and definitive style, to which all artists within the state must conform. All other styles are banned, and the artists who practise them are persecuted. It is interesting to note that this ban is applied, not merely to superrealism and expressionism, which might be supposed to have some socially disintegrating effects, but also to constructivism, the aim of which is so positive and tectonic. This only goes to show that



people who exalt the rational motive above all others inevitably and instinctively reject any activity which proceeds from another region of the mind.

In the case of the democratic state, we are not able to make any such neat *a priori* identification—and for a very good reason. The libertarian attitude is essentially an experimental attitude, and therefore in the field of art it welcomes any form of activity which will provide a working hypothesis. The American philosopher, John Dewey, has recently identified democracy and the scientific method. Let me quote a few relevant sentences from his book, *Freedom and Culture*:<sup>1</sup>

“It is of the nature of science not so much to tolerate as to welcome diversity of opinion, while it insists that inquiry brings the evidence of observed facts to bear to effect a consensus of conclusions—and even then to hold the conclusion subject to what is ascertained and made public in further new inquiries. I would not claim that any existing democracy has ever made complete or adequate use of scientific method in deciding upon its policies. But freedom of inquiry, toleration of diverse views, freedom of communication, the distribution of what is found out to every individual as the ultimate intellectual consumer, are involved in the democratic as in the scientific method. When democracy openly recognizes the existence of *problems* and the need for probing them *as* problems as its glory, it will relegate political groups that pride themselves upon refusing to admit incompatible opinions to the obscurity which already is the fate of similar groups in science.”

Similarly, I feel inclined to say that when such a society, which must therefore be a libertarian society, openly recognizes the existence of distinct types of personality, and the necessity for these types to express themselves artistically, it will relegate artistic groups that pride themselves upon refusing to admit incompatible styles to the obscurity which is already the fate of similar groups in science. Any kind of exclusiveness or

<sup>1</sup> London (Allen & Unwin), 1940, p. 102.

intolerance is just as opposed to the principles of liberty as social exclusiveness or political intolerance. In this respect art, and all cultural modes of expression, are of exactly the same status as political opinions.

The scientific method implies, nevertheless, some progress and some definite conclusions. The progress may be slow and the conclusions may be tentative, but at some stage the problem seems to be solved and a certain line of action to be indicated. It is only in chess, in the crossword puzzle and sometimes in mathematics, that the problem is set for the mere sake of arriving at a solution. The organization of society has, therefore, or should have, a definite aim, and though that aim may be described in general terms as the achievement of the good life, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and so on, from time to time it has a more specific aim—or rather, this general aim is divided into many detailed aims—shorter stages towards the final achievement. At the present moment most of these aims are subordinated to the one aim of defending our liberty from the threat of the totalitarian power of Germany, but in more normal times we have various social and cultural aims, some of which impinge very directly on the province of the artist. It is precisely because these aims are *various* that they will demand, not one type of artist, but all types. Let me try to indicate briefly the possible ways in which each type of artist might find his function in a libertarian society of the future.

A democracy does not despise or suppress that faculty which the totalitarian socialist makes so exclusive—his thinking or rational faculty. The libertarian socialist must also plan, but his plans, apart from being tentative and experimental, will make the widest use of all human faculties. Thus, he will plan the building of a new city, or the rebuilding of an old one. But in so doing he will not merely consider the rational factors, such as the distribution of the buildings, the width and direction of the streets, the provision of open spaces and recreational amenities, all of which can be arrived at by the process of thought; he will also consider the relation of mass to mass, of surface to surface, of line and outline, until he has reached,

through the faculty of intuition, a natural harmony. But even that is not sufficient. The libertarian planner must also remember that cities are built for citizens, and that the houses and buildings will be inhabited, not by ciphers, but by human beings with sensations and feelings, and that these human beings will be unhappy unless they can freely express themselves in their environment. It may be that these faculties can only be expressed individually, or in group activities like drama and sport; but at least your city must be so planned that it allows for the possibility of such activities. No doubt the planner will remember to provide a theatre and a sports-ground; what he is likely to forget is some provision for the retirement and seclusion of each person. For it is upon personal happiness that society ultimately and collectively depends.

It is, still more certainly, upon personal happiness that the future of art depends. But by "happiness" I do not mean that state of eupeptic contentment which is actually of all states of mind the one least favourable to the production of a work of art. Happiness, in the field of art, means work: the capacity and ability to create something near the heart's desire. The happiness is not in the possession of the thing created, but in the act of creating it. It is the thesis so often and so rightly defended by Eric Gill—the thesis "that human culture is the natural product of human living, and that human living is naturally and chiefly a matter of human working; that leisure is in its essence recreative, that the object of recreation is to fit us for living, that we may rejoice as a giant to run the course". We make a table and call it work; we make a picture and call it art if we mean to sell the picture, recreation if we make it for our own amusement. But there is really no distinction: the art is not determined by the purpose of the thing we make, but by its inherent qualities, the qualities with which the artist has endowed it; and the pleasure of art comes from the act of creating these and, in a secondary and stimulating way, from the mental act of re-creating them in contemplation. What I wish to prevent is any narrow conception either of the artist or of the work of art. Every human being is potentially

an artist, and this potentiality is of considerable social significance. The individual and society are the opposite poles of a very complex relationship. The individual is anti-social at the time of birth—observe the early days of any baby. He only becomes social by a painful process of adaptation, during which he acquires what we call, paradoxically, his personality, but actually that compromise character which is the result of subordinating personality to the prevalent conception of social normality. The psychological ills from which human beings suffer are a product of this compromise, or mal-adjustment. What becomes more and more certain is that these ills can to a large extent be avoided by the practice of some art. The people who make things—I have no evidence beyond my own observation—seem to be less liable to nervous breakdowns, and one of the recognized forms of treatment for mental diseases is known as “occupational therapy”. No one would suggest that the function of art is merely to keep people healthy; but it has its subjective effect. The artist not only creates an object external to himself: in doing so he also vitally reorganizes the balance of impulses within himself.

Our glance at the social function of art therefore reinforces the libertarian conception of art. All types of art are not merely permissible, but desirable. The needs of society comprise, not only the outward structure of a world to live in, but also the inward structure of a mind capable of enjoying life. We must therefore search for methods of encouraging the artist—the artist latent in each one of us.

There still remains the question of *value* in art. We may all become artists, but unless our human nature changes radically, only a few of us can become *great* artists. How do we measure this difference—the difference between mediocrity and genius?

The truth is, there is not one measure, but several. Some people, and possibly the majority of people at some time, use one only of these measures; others use a combination of two or more measures and take their average. Actually I find that these measures are again four in number. There is first the direct application of what we call a canon—that is to say, an

established law. It may be a law of geometrical proportion, of colour combinations, of a definite type of human figure, of a definite "order" in architecture. It is a measure we are conscious of, and can apply exactly. Then—and this is the measure that has been most used in the past century—there is the measure of sensibility. The human being is regarded as a sensitive instrument who gives out and receives delicate vibrations in the presence of colours, textures and spatial relations, and a work of art is measured by the number and intensity of the vibrations which emanate from him. Nearly related to this kind of sensibility, but in reality quite distinct, is our intuitive apprehension of space and time, and our expression of their relations in rhythm and harmony: our intuition of the absolute values of form. Finally, there is our appreciation of the dramatic or symbolic significance of the pictorial content of a work of art—the feelings which are aroused in us by the images which the artist uses to express himself.

We have thus four methods of critical approach to the work of art, and each method is valid for its corresponding type of art. Between these critical poles there will again be mixed modes of apprehension and judgment, so that the satisfaction we derive from the observance of academic canons can be modified on the one side by our intuition of harmonic relations, and on the other side by our sensibility to colours and textures. At the other extreme the psychological significance of our dramatic images may be combined with a sensitive rendering of these images, and even by an "abstraction" of such images; in other words, superrealism will merge, as we know it does, towards constructivism on the one side and towards expressionism on the other. But again I think it will be found that the opposite points of the compass tend to conflict—we cannot, that is to say, at one and the same time satisfy the very rational and conscious laws of an academic canon and express the fantasies which we find ready-made in the unconscious. Nor do I think that the extreme sensibility which we get in the impressionistic paintings of Monet or Renoir can combine with

the formal intuitions which are the basis of the art of Seurat or Ben Nicholson. But the mind of the spectator has more than one mode of appreciation—more than one approach to art—and I find nothing reprehensible—indeed I find it but natural—that one man's taste should be universal. Art, like the human mind itself, embraces contradictions; it is the balance of these contradictions that produces the high degree of tension necessary for the production of the greatest works of art.

Actually we each tend to select the critical approach which is appropriate to the psychological type to which we belong. Whether the wholly harmonious mind exists—the mind equally balanced between thought and feeling, between intuition and sensation—is perhaps doubtful, but surely that is the ideal towards which we ought to strive. Only such a mind can appreciate the fullness and richness of life. If we come to the conclusion that this complete and harmonious being cannot exist in our modern form of society, then our aim should be to change that form of society until such a life becomes possible. In this great aim, in which the energies of humanity will be absorbed for centuries to come, a right understanding of the nature of art and of the function of the artist is fundamental.

## The Nature of Revolutionary Art

*Like industry, art has never adapted itself to the demands of theorists; it always upsets their plans of social harmony, and humanity has found the freedom of art far too satisfactory ever to think of allowing it to be controlled by the creators of dull systems of sociology. The Marxists are accustomed to seeing the ideologists look at things the wrong way round, and so, in contrast to their enemies, they should look upon art as a reality which begets ideas and not as an application of ideas.*

GEORGES SOREL, *Reflections on Violence*.

IN the fragmentary notes which conclude his Introduction to *The Critique of Political Economy*, Marx recognized "an unequal relationship between the development of material production and artistic production", but did not despair of reconciling such a contradiction by means of the dialectical method. He himself never had the time or opportunity to resolve the problem, and some of his remarks on the subject are in the nature of hasty generalizations which no doubt he would have corrected on further consideration—as, for example, his explanation of the eternal appeal of Greek art as due to the eternal child in us, an hypothesis evidently derived directly from Vico. Marx's hesitation and, indeed, faltering over this problem should at least have deterred his followers from a superficial treatment of one of the most complex categories of history that still await dialectical analysis. This immense subject does not concern us now, but on the basis of a superficial and essentially undialectical approach to the whole problem, certain assumptions have been made as to the nature of a true

revolutionary art, or a true proletarian art, which only bring ridicule on the cultural aspects of the revolutionary movement.

Revolutionary art should be revolutionary. That surely is a simple statement from which we can begin the discussion. We can at once dismiss the feeble interpretation of such a statement as an injunction to paint pictures of red flags, hammers and sickles, factories and machines, or revolutionary subjects in general (if I take examples from the plastic arts, I do so only for convenience, and what I say would apply equally to music<sup>1</sup> and poetry and all the arts we are concerned with). But such a feeble interpretation does actually persist among communists, and is responsible for the partisan adulation of a competent but essentially second-rate artist like Diego Rivera.

We can best approach the question from the angle of an abstract art like architecture. (That this particular art has undergone some queer transformations in Russia is beside the point; there are explanations of the anomaly, but they have little to do with aesthetics.) Architecture is a necessary art, and it is intimately bound up with the social reconstruction which must take place under a revolutionary régime. How do we, as Englishmen, conceive a revolutionary architecture? As a reversion to Tudor rusticity, or Georgian stateliness, or the bourgeois pomp of the neo-classical style? Surely none of these styles can for a moment be considered in relation to the city of the future. Must we not rather confidently look forward to a development of that architecture which, in Walter Gropius's words, "bodies itself forth, not in stylistic imitation or ornamental frippery, but in those simple and sharply modelled designs in which every part merges naturally into the compre-

<sup>1</sup> A pathetic moral may be drawn from the development of the composer Shostakovich. An excellent analysis of the progressive deterioration of this artist under political pressure has been made recently by Gerald Abraham in *Horizon*, vol. vi. no. 35 (September 1942). The "pressure" may not be overtly political: it may be the politician's interpretation of popular taste, which is rather worse, for then the politician is presuming to make and enforce an aesthetic judgment. Cf. Emma Lu Davis, quoted on p. 137 below.



hensive volume of the whole"? Only in this manner, by following the path clearly indicated by Gropius and his followers, can we find "a concrete expression of the life of our epoch".

That surely must be admitted. If we then pass from architecture and ask ourselves what is the parallel to this new style in the arts of painting and sculpture, can we for a moment be satisfied with a Rivera or a Tsapline? Is there not rather an essential contradiction between such anecdotal and "literary" art and the vitality and intellectual strength of the new architecture?

The question cannot be answered without a short digression on the nature of art. Any considerable work of art has two distinct elements: a formal element appealing to our sensibility for reasons which cannot be stated with any clarity, but which are certainly psychological if not physiological in origin; and an arbitrary or variable element of more complex appeal which like a suit of clothing seems to cover these underlying forms. It is at least arguable that the purely formal element in art does not change; that the same canons of harmony and proportion are present in primitive art, in Greek art, in Gothic art, in Renaissance art and in the art of the present day. Such forms, we may say, are archetypal; due to the physical structure of the world and the psychological structure of man. And it is for this reason that the artist, with some show of reason, can take up an attitude of detachment. It is his sense of the importance of the archetypal which makes him relatively indifferent to the phenomenal.

The recognition of such universal formal qualities in art is consistently materialistic. It no more contradicts the materialistic interpretation of history than does a recognition of the relative permanency of the human form, or of the forms of crystals in geology. Certain factors in life are constant; but to that extent they are not part of history. History is concerned with that part of life which is subject to change; and the Marxian dialectic is an interpretation of history, not a theory of the biological structure or morphology of life.

Another consideration which mitigates the objection to the

formalistic attitude is that, granted the existence of permanent and unchanging elements in art, there is, admittedly, at various periods, a different valuation of such elements. In fact, what is the difference between classical and romantic epochs but a difference in the emphasis given to the formal basis of works of art? We cannot say that a romantic painter like Delacroix lacks form—or that a classical painter like Poussin has too much of it. If we could in any way measure the degree of form in these two artists we should probably find that it was equal.

But in the classical artist the form is so important that the subject-matter is almost irrelevant; whilst in the romantic artist the subject-matter is so important that it completely overwhelms the form. It is merely, we might say, a difference of accent. But it is in precisely such a way that a reasonable Marxist would expect art to be inflected. We can, therefore, in any broad historical generalizations, dismiss the underlying formal structure of art, to concentrate on style and mannerism. For it is in style and mannerism that the prevailing ideology of a period is expressed.

If we admit so much, it follows that it is a mere illusion for the artist to imagine that he can for ever maintain an attitude of detachment. I can only see one logical exception—the artist who can so deprive his work of temporary and accidental qualities that what he achieves is in effect *pure form*. And, significantly enough, that is the claim of one extreme of the abstract or constructivist movement, an extreme which includes some of the most talented artists now living. Having no sympathy with any existing ideology, they attempt to escape into a world without ideologies. They shut themselves within the Ivory Tower, and it is just possible that, *for the time being* (the very special time in which we live), their tactics may be of some advantage to the art of the future. Their position will become clearer as we proceed.

Apart from such a desperate retreat, we have to admit that the artist cannot in any effective way avoid the economic conditions of his time; he cannot ignore them, for they will not

ignore him. Reality, in one guise or another, forces the artist along a determined course, and if the artist does not realize this, it is only because he is in the middle of the stream, where the water is deep and the current strong.

As I have said elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> this question of the relation of the individual to the collective society of which he is a member is the fundamental issue, in art as well as in politics. It is the fundamental question *within* religion too, for what is the Reformation but the affirmation of the autocentric will of the individual against the collective rule of the Church? Philosophically it is the issue between Scholasticism and Cartesianism, between materialism and idealism. But the relation between mind and reality, between the individual and the community, is not one of precedence; it is more one of action and reaction, a process of tacking against the wind. The current of reality is strong, and troubles the mind; but the mind embraces this contrary force, and is lifted higher, and carried away farther, by the very opposition. And so with the individual and the community: complete freedom means inevitable decadence. The mind must feel an opposition—must be tamped with hard realities if it is to have any blasting power.

That by no means exhausts the problem of the relation of the individual to society. It is a problem which in its psychological as well as sociological aspects I have discussed more thoroughly in another book,<sup>2</sup> and all I can say at present is that I think the relative freedom of the individual—I mean, of course, his intellectual freedom—can be justified within the Marxian orthodoxy. Stalin has said that, "Marxism starts out with the assumption that people's tastes and requirements are not, and cannot be, equal in quality or in quantity, either in the period of Socialism or in the period of Communism". Tastes and requirements do not become differentiated in quality without independence of thought and criticism, and such independence is essential for any dialectical development in culture. The U.S.S.R. has found it necessary, purely for pragmatic reasons,

<sup>1</sup> *Art and Society* (London: Heinemann, 1937).

<sup>2</sup> *Education Through Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 1943).

to admit a certain degree of what is called "self-criticism", thus recognizing a social rather than a political justification for intellectual freedom. The psychology of the individual cannot be separated from the psychology of the group, and for that reason alone the old conception of individuality will not serve for the new order of society.

Let us return to the actualities of modern art. Excluding the great mass of academic bourgeois art, and within the general category of revolutionary art, we have two distinct movements, both professing to be modern, both *intentionally* revolutionary.

The first of these has no very descriptive label, but is essentially formalist, in the sense already mentioned. It is sometimes called abstract, sometimes non-figurative, sometimes constructivist, sometimes geometric. It is most typically represented by painters like Mondrian, Héliou and Ben Nicholson; and by sculptors like Brancusi, Gabo and Barbara Hepworth.

The second movement has a distinctive name—*Surréalisme* or Superrealism—and is represented by painters like Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, Miro, Tanguy, and by a sculptor like Arp.

The first movement is plastic, objective and ostensibly non-political.

The second group is literary (even in paint), subjective, and is actively communist, though generally anti-Stalinist.

Those distinctions are obvious, on the surface. But I want to suggest that we cannot be satisfied with such superficial distinctions. We cannot accept the superrealists at their own valuation, and welcome them as the only true revolutionary artists. Nevertheless, they are performing a very important revolutionary function,<sup>1</sup> and it must be said on their behalf that they realize the importance of their function with far more clarity than the official Marxians, who have shown them no favour. For official Marxians, concentrating on their economic problems, do not see the relevance of the cultural problem, more particularly the artistic problem. The mind of the artist, they complacently assume, that too will, in Trotsky's phrase, limp after the reality the politicians are creating.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 98 above.

But everywhere the greatest obstacle to the creation of this new social reality is the existence of the cultural heritage of the past—the religion, the philosophy, the literature and the art which makes up the whole complex ideology of the bourgeois mind. The logic of the facts—the economic facts: war, poverty amidst plenty, social injustice—that logic cannot be denied. But so long as the bourgeois mind has its bourgeois ideology it will deny the facts; it will construct an elaborate rationalization which effectively ignores them.

The superrealists, who possess very forceful expositors of their point of view, realize this very clearly, and the object of their movement is therefore to discredit the bourgeois ideology in art, to destroy the academic conception of art. Their whole tendency is negative and destructive. The particular method they adopt, in so far as they have a common method, consists in breaking down the barriers between the conscious reality of life and the unconscious reality of the dream-world—to so mingle fact and fancy that the normal concept of reality no longer has existence. It is a similar tendency which Carl Einstein found in the later work of Braque, and to some extent Braque may be considered as a superrealist—Picasso too. Superrealists like Ernst and Dali complete the disintegration of the academic concept of reality begun by Picasso and Braque.

We can see, therefore, the place of superrealism in the revolutionary movement. What of this other kind of modern art—the art of pure form immured in its Ivory Tower?

That art, too, I wish to contend, has its revolutionary function, and in the end it is the most important function of all. Superrealism is a negative art, as I have said, a destructive art; it follows that it has only a temporary rôle; it is the art of a transitional period. It may lead to a new romanticism, especially in literature, but that lies beyond its immediate function.

But abstract art has a positive function. It keeps inviolate, until such time as society will once more be ready to make use of them, the universal qualities of art—those elements which survive all change and revolutions. It may be said that as such it is merely art in pickle—an activity divorced from reality,

of no immediate interest to the revolutionary. But that, I maintain, is a very short view of the situation. And actually such art is not so much in pickle as might be supposed. For in one sphere, in architecture and to some extent in industrial art, it is already in social action. There we find the essential link between the abstract movement in modern painting and the most advanced movement in modern architecture—the architecture of Gropius, Markelius, Lloyd Wright, Aalto, Le Corbusier. . . . It is not merely a similarity of form and intention, but an actual and intimate association of personalities.

This single link points the way to the art of the future—the art of a classless society. It is impossible to predict all the forms of this art, and it will be many years before it reaches its maturity. But we cannot build a new society—and we must literally *build* such a society, with bricks and mortar, steel and glass—we cannot build such a society without artists. The artists are there, waiting for their opportunity: abstract artists who are, in this time of transition, perfecting their formal sensibility,<sup>1</sup> and who will be ready, when the time comes, to apply their talents to the great work of reconstruction. Reconstruction is not work for romantic traditionalists and literary sentimentalists. Constructive socialism is realistic, scientific, essentially classical. But let us realize that we have false romanticists in our midst—tender-minded idealists who would like to blur the precise outlines of our vision with sentimental ideals of naturalism, homespun simplicity and social naïvety, community-singing and boy-scoutism. Such people imagine that revolutionary art is a kind of folk-art, peasant pottery, madrigals and ballads: the Stalinists encourage the debased lacquer and papier-mâché crafts of Palekh and Mstera, and their so-called “socialist realism” is merely bourgeois pictorialism. We want a conception of art which is at once more imaginative and more precise, even intellectual and “difficult”, something which we can without falsity and self-deception put beside the great creative epochs of the past.

<sup>1</sup> I have dealt with the social function of the abstract artist in *Art and Industry* (London, 1934).

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## A Civilization from Under

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*For the most part we shall be too busy doing the work that lies ready to our hands, to let impatience for visibly great progress vex us too much; but surely, since we are servants of a Cause, hope must be ever with us, and sometimes perhaps it will so quicken our vision that it will outrun the slow lapse of time, and show us the victorious days when millions of those who now sit in darkness will be enlightened by an Art made by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user.*

WILLIAM MORRIS, *The Beauty of Life*.

CERTAIN general problems connected with the social function of the artist tend to be neglected because they are not practical problems of design in relation to particular objects or particular industries. In the ordinary course of discussion we simplify the factors involved. We think of the object to be designed—something simple and comprehensible enough. We think of the designer—an individual who has to be brought into relation with this object. We think of the manufacturer, again as an individual who has to be persuaded to employ the designer; and perhaps, if we are considerate enough, we think of the consumer, again as an individual who has to be persuaded to buy the object designed. It then looks like a simple series of links which have only to be made aware of each other to form an unbroken chain.

But it is not so simple in reality. Just as the economists find that their economic man—the Robinson Crusoe of the textbooks—has little or no correspondence to the mass-man of modern society, so we discover that our designer, our manu-

facturer and our consumer cannot be considered as isolated units. They are all part of a social complex which cannot be dismantled—which adds up to something more than the sum of its component units.

In the end it turns out that we are not dealing with single or simple units of any kind, but with social groups, vocational groups, national groups, and in general with what we call psychological or ideological factors—habits and fashions which have their roots in tradition, in superstition, in the unconscious levels of the human personality.

It may all be expressed in the old proverb: "You may take a horse to the trough, but you cannot make him drink." All our efforts to improve design are useless unless we can persuade the public to adopt them. But that does not express the real necessity. We do not *persuade* the horse to drink; it drinks when it is thirsty. There must arise in the public, therefore, a natural appetite for things of good design. That appetite must exist as a normal state of health.

Now the dogma to which I cling, and for which I could if necessary offer psychological and biological evidence, is that the instinct for what we call good design is an innate possession of every unspoilt human being. It is one of the ironies of history that all the cycles of civilization still leave the savage and the peasant in possession of the surest instinct for the fundamentally right plastic forms. These primitives have not got what we call the brains to design a motor-car or a seaside pavilion, but they never fail to make a good job of a bowl or a basket, a blanket or a boat.

It is logical to conclude, therefore, that it is all a question of education—that if we can bring up our children in such a way that their taste is not corrupted, then this natural instinct for good design will have free play and gradually the whole taste of our time and country will be purified.

A right system of education is, admittedly, going to be one of the principal agents of reform, but the moment you approach this aspect of the problem with any practical intention, you encounter overwhelming difficulties. It is not a question of



squeezing in an extra hour for art, or of making handicraft a compulsory instead of an optional subject; it is not even a question of finding teachers with the necessary qualifications. If we are going to solve the problem in this way we shall be faced with the necessity of revising the curricula at every stage of the educational system, because not only must we secure time and opportunity for the *positive* teaching of good design, but we must also make sure that no negative and frustrating tendencies exist elsewhere in the educational system. In other words, it is no good developing the creative and appreciative exercise of the aesthetic impulse in the child if at the same time in some other direction our methods of teaching are inhibiting and deforming this impulse. The whole balance of education, as between intellectual and instinctive activity, must be redressed. Let us frankly face the fact that the joyful expression of rhythm and harmony and colour has nothing whatever to do with logic, reason and memory and the rest of our intellectual fetishes. I am not an anti-intellectualist. I do not say that we had better trust to our instincts in all the affairs of life. But I do say that our educational system is grossly overweighted with intellectual aims; that this rationalization of the child has a stultifying effect on its aesthetic impulse and is directly responsible for the triumph of ugliness in our age.

But the educational difficulties do not end with that immense problem. We may educate the child in school, but outside the school another educational process goes on all the time—the influence of the child's environment. It is no good developing the creative and appreciative impulse in the child if at the same time we compel it to inhabit ugly schools, to go home through ugly streets and to live in an ugly house surrounded by ugly objects. And so, insensibly, we are led to the wider social problem. Education alone will not suffice, because education can only be partial and is perhaps impossible in the chaos of ugliness which the industrial age has created.

It is such considerations as these which may well lead to the conclusion that no good can be done in this sphere unless and

until the social system is changed. That seems to be the logical and inevitable conclusion to which we are driven. But at the same time we have to guard against the assumption that we have only to change the social system to secure our aims.

The great international exhibition which was held at Paris a few years ago was very instructive in this respect. There we saw displayed side by side the industrial art of all the countries of the world. It was possible to criticize the display and say that one or another pavilion did not represent the best that a particular nation was capable of. But in any case there was enough to be seen to establish certain general conclusions of a negative kind. It was quite impossible, that is to say, to find any law of correspondence between the artistic level of the products of the countries represented and their social or political institutions. It was not possible to say that obviously the totalitarian states were making a better job of industrial design than the democratic states. Indeed, in quite different ways and for quite distinct reasons, the exhibits of Russia and Germany were among the worst to be seen, whilst those of the other totalitarian state, Italy, were surprisingly good. The best of all, perhaps, came from the small democratic but still capitalist states of Holland, Sweden and Finland. But though we might quarrel in detail about the relative merits of the various national exhibits at Paris, I think we should all agree on the point I am concerned to make: that no particular social system—communism, fascism or capitalism—will necessarily of *itself* guarantee good design in objects of daily use.

It is simple enough to trace many of the inartistic and decadent qualities in the things we make and use to the prevailing industrial system. The material conditions of poverty which most people support throughout their lives, the lack of leisure and consequential dullness and ignorance—these are the social aspects of the system which prevent any element of quality or discrimination entering into daily life. It is also possible to argue that the very system in its actual mechanism also

prevents the emergence of quality—by the division of labour, mass methods of production, material economies demanded by the universal profit motive. But in fairness it must be pointed out that the system, even under its present economic motivation, can and does produce many objects which have aesthetic qualities, and that we may fail to perceive these qualities because of our anti-industrial prejudices. I refer to the aeroplanes and motor-cars and other typical products of the modern industrial system which are by no means devoid of those elements of beauty which we find in classical art. I do not wish to insist on this aspect of the question, but it should serve to warn us that there is no necessary connection between the economic and even the ethical characteristics of an industrial system and the aesthetic merits of the products of that system.

Let us turn for a moment to the positive evidence offered by the case of Russia. In one vast industrial area, amounting to one-sixth of the world, the old economic system was destroyed by revolution a quarter of a century ago, and a new economic system which has gradually eliminated the profit motive and has given the workers of Russia indirect control of the processes of production has been established. The technical features of capitalist production remain, and have even been intensified. Division of labour and mass production remain. There is still little leisure, and though there is no longer acute poverty, there is no great abundance. It is still an economy of scarcity, and it is still a money economy. Workers are paid wages according to the kind and amount of work they do, and the more they do the more they are paid.

It is not necessary for me to go into all the details of the Soviet system; the very act of presenting them might arouse controversy. The most general and most significant feature of the whole Soviet economy, distinguishing it from ours and from every other system in the world, is that it is centrally controlled for the total benefit of the people. This centralization means not only that the kind and quantity of goods is planned on a national scale, but also that there is every possibility of controlling the quality. And great efforts are made to this end.

Artists and designers are organized in co-operatives, and their services are placed at the disposal of the soviets and factories.<sup>1</sup> We all know what a great part museums and exhibitions play in the social life of the country, and even more direct encouragement is given to artists. "Annually (to quote a recent authority<sup>2</sup>) the Council of People's Commissars now offers monetary awards to men and women who have attained distinction in the arts. In 1941 these awards embraced music, painting, sculpture, architecture, theatre, opera, dramatic writing, ballet, motion pictures, fiction, poetry, literary criticism. In each division three to five artists received a first award of 100,000 roubles each, and from three to ten a second award of half that sum."

From all this it would seem that Russia must be an earthly paradise for the artist, and undoubtedly the artist is treated with more respect in Russia than anywhere else in the world. Let me quote one more witness—a well-known American sculptress, Enma Lu Davis:

"In the Spring of 1935 I went to Russia. I wanted to see how the artists were organized over there, how they were utilized in the scheme of life, and how socialized patronage affected the arts. I found that from an economic-social standpoint the Soviet artist enjoys the happiest situation in the world; as a trade union member he enjoys protection and social security, he never lacks employment, and building and decorative projects are broad enough to include all varieties of work—*except good work*. This, I believe, was in no way the fault of socialism. Soviet artists are not regimented any more than artists in other countries, but it happens that the pressure of popular taste is toward bad and tawdry styles in painting and sculpture. Russia has not a broad or intelligent popular base of appreciation of real beautiful projects. The Russian tradition of real folk painting disappeared four or five hundred years ago with the last of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 108 above, for further details.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Hindus, *Russia Fights On* (London, 1942), p. 127.

the fine ikons. Since then there has been nothing but a second-rate tradition of academic paint and clay pushing." <sup>1</sup>

The significant fact which emerges from all the evidence we can collect about the situation of the artist in Russia is that in spite of a fundamental change in the economic system, and in spite of all this direct encouragement of the arts by those in authority, there has not been anything in the nature of an artistic renaissance. In spite of state-supported artists' co-operatives, in spite of large monetary awards and official honours, in spite of a socialized and centrally planned economy, Russia does not turn out for the admiration of the world pots which are better than the pots we make in Staffordshire, glassware which is better than the glassware of Sweden, furniture which is better than the furniture of Finland, films which are better than the films of America, paintings and sculpture which are better than the paintings and sculpture of France or Spain. Its theatre, its opera and its ballet are undoubtedly better than anything of their kind in Europe, but these are arts which are traditionally good in Russia, and which have no direct relation to the economic system.

This is a very significant and even a very disturbing fact, and it should be examined dispassionately, without the least trace of political bias. It is a scientific problem. A nation has taken certain measures to produce certain results. In one respect the experiment failed. We are about to make the same experiment. Let us take care not to make the same mistake.

I believe the mistake is fundamentally this: You cannot impose a culture from the top—it must come from under. It grows out of the soil, out of the people, out of their daily life and work. It is a spontaneous expression of their joy in life, of their joy in work, and if this joy does not exist, the culture will not exist. Joy is a spiritual quality, an impalpable quality; that too cannot be forced. It must be an inevitable state of mind, born of the elementary processes of life, a by-product of natural human growth. Obviously there are material conditions

<sup>1</sup> *Americans*, 1942 (New York : Museum of Modern Art), p. 44.

which favour its emergence. A people cannot be joyful if it is hungry or poverty-stricken, if it is stricken by war or oppression. Unfortunately the Russian people has been hungry and poor, threatened by war and oppressed. We cannot, therefore, sit in academic judgment on the quality of its culture. But I think it is evident enough that the worst kind of oppression came from within. The first authority I quoted just now, an observer who has written many sympathetic books about the Soviet régime, goes on to say that these men and women who compete for the awards offered to the artists, and others like them, "have had to speak the political language, the political thought of the Kremlin, which, with no concession to difference of opinion or will, has, in its own way, been ruthlessly driving the nation everywhere, to its own formula of living, its own, steely resolve to convert the country as rapidly as possible into a far-flung military fortress".

To-day no one conscious of the magnificent efficiency of that far-flung military fortress, and of all that it has meant to our own security and comfort in this country, would for a moment question that ruthless aim, in spite of all it has entailed in cultural shortcomings. We have not the right, and I hope not the impudence, to criticize Russia in this respect. At the same time, we must acknowledge the facts, patiently observe the sociological processes that are taking place under our eyes. If we do that in the spirit of science and realism, then I do not think we can avoid the conclusion that this centralized control of the arts and of all modes of artistic expression has defeated its own end in Russia. The arts, we may conclude—and not only from this vast modern experiment, but from the vaster experiment of human evolution—can only thrive in an atmosphere of liberty. Artists may be prosperous under a tyranny, and most dictators, conscious of the judgment of history, try to weave a cloak of culture to hide their misdeeds. But the judgment of history is absolute, and when tyrants and artists have passed away, the art remains, to be tried by laws which are neither economic nor utilitarian, but solely aesthetic.

I suggest that certain broad conclusions emerge from all

kind of education is socially disintegrating, and it should be accompanied by some process which\* corrects the tendency towards disintegration, and brings the individual back into the social unit. In primitive societies—societies which are nearly always remarkable for the cohesion of their culture and the vitality of their way of life—there exists such a process. Instead of “education” we find certain rites of “initiation”—a drawing of the individual into society, to merge him with the group. We use the same word in connection with religious communities—and always with the implication of a leading “in”, and not a drawing “out”. Education should be balanced by initiation—a drawing of the individual into the community, making him conscious of its collective life, its collective ideals and aspirations. We vaguely realize this truth in our attempt to create a youth movement. But I mean something much more intimate and far-reaching than anything implied in such social patchwork. I mean a conception of education which is socialized from the kindergarten up, in which every classroom is a busy little workshop, every schoolboy a novice seeking initiation into the mysteries of art and science, every lesson a group activity, binding and inspiring the individual, creating that collective consciousness which is the spiritual energy of a people and the only source of its art and culture.

Now if that is true—if this interpretation of the obvious facts is admitted—then it must make a difference to our policy. It is only too easy—I confess it has often been my own state of mind—to give up the direct struggle for an immediate object in the hope or expectation that a social revolution of some sort will change everything for the better, including in its general sweep the aim for which we have been so vainly struggling. But that is disproved by the evidence of the past twenty years. In no single case can it be said that a social or economic revolution has brought about a higher standard of public taste. If anything, the evidence shows that unless accompanied by an intelligent system of education, an increase in the social and economic well-being of any group of people only leads to an expansion of vulgarity and bad taste.

It follows that we must strive now and always for our immediate objectives. Our struggle is on the artistic or aesthetic plane, and to secure our ends, to establish our purely aesthetic ideals, we must be prepared to think outside the categories of the existing political systems. In particular, we must abandon the idea that all our problems can be solved by "the state". I do not question the power of the state: it is said that the Mother of Parliaments can do all things, even unto changing the sex of her citizens. But that is not the point. In so far as it is a question of preserving life and property, of securing decency and cleanliness, the state now acts with an almost excessive thoroughness. But it almost completely ignores the equally important questions of what I will call public appearances—the colour and shape and visual agreeableness of what everybody has to see and use every day of their lives. It is difficult to understand why the state, which prevents a man from getting drunk or committing a felony, should not only allow but even encourage this same man to foul the public vision with an ugly house or a hideous piece of furniture. It can only be because the state as such is an expression of purely economic values. In any less materialistic standard of values the sin of ugliness would rank a good deal higher than the sin of covetousness.

We need a reform of public taste—a vast cultural movement comparable to the religious Reformation of the sixteenth century. But a reformation is a violent process; it doesn't just happen. It means breaking down old habits, making new associations, adapting ourselves to new conditions. It is a difficult and uncomfortable experience for the majority of people, and the majority of people are just not going to bother to reform themselves if it involves conscious effort. We must not forget that the Englishman's home is his castle, and that he quite instinctively, and quite rightly, resents the interference of people who propose to invade his private domain, and not merely invade it, but pass rude remarks about what they find there—the china and the curtains, the carpets and the chairs, even the ornaments on the mantelpiece. And that is the



attitude not only of the man in the street, but also of the manufacturer of such carpets and chairs and ornaments. Such people resent the activities of the reformer still more bitterly—to them we are just obnoxious interlopers trying to tell them how to run their business.

There is, of course, a technique for dealing with the manufacturer. We can point out to him—indeed we can prove to him—that what we call good design is a commercial asset, and that in a world of shrinking markets, where the manufacturer can depend less and less on the exploitation of new consumers, the appearance and quality of his goods is going to be the determining factor. But our obligations do not end with the conversion of the manufacturer, much as that is to be desired. We must still work on the imponderables—public taste, public education, the general level of culture in the masses.

I have said that you cannot impose a culture from the top—it must be a by-product of the natural productive activity of the people. But this does not mean that we must just sit back and wait for the miracle to happen. Regeneration will begin at the bottom, in the family, in the school, in the workshop and in the parish and the borough. Action will be regional rather than national, but we might make a beginning with those institutions which are already subject to regional and communal control. Already a vast amount of production and distribution is carried out by public or semi-public bodies which might take the lead in those “rites of initiation” which will give the individual a social morality and a pride in public appearances. When we consider that it is our ambition not only to improve the design of pots and pans, of furniture and textiles, but also of public buildings like town halls and railway stations, council houses and government offices, of roads and all they carry in the way of signposts and lighting systems; when we consider, moreover, that a democratic organization like the Co-operative Movement is one of the worst offenders in the field of design—then we shall begin to see why we must create a public conscience in this matter. We must create a public standard of taste (decent design) comparable to the

public standard of behaviour (decent conduct—which does exist though it is not always observed). And design is something more tangible than conduct.

Bernard Shaw once said with reference to the proposed national theatre: "It is a simple historical fact that cultural institutions have to be imposed on the masses by rulers or private patrons enlightened enough to know that such institutions are neither luxuries nor mere amusements but necessities of civilized life." I don't agree with this dictum: I believe that cultural institutions "imposed on" the masses are so much dead weight—to hell with such culture! But this does not mean that the taste of a people should not find spontaneous expression in national institutions, and I would like to see, not only a National Gallery and a National Theatre, but also a National Cinema, a National Ballet, and a national institution for the exhibition of the beautiful things created by a people's industry. We need not call it a Museum—that conveys the notion of a place where the past is preserved. We want a place where the future is forecast. Let us call it, therefore, the House of Good Design, and let it be worthy of the power and potentialities of our industries; let there be at least one cathedral to commemorate the achievements of the Machine Age.

I realize that I have not yet answered the simple and devastating question: to what end? Why should we take this trouble and expend this energy for the sake of something so intangible as beauty? There is the economic argument already used, but the economist might turn on us and say: let us rather have a League of Industrial Peace to eliminate all competitive factors, among them design. After all, from a strictly economic point of view, there is no need to make things beautiful so long as they function satisfactorily. No; in the end we must abandon the economic argument. We must use it for strategic purposes, but finally we shall have to confess that beauty is its own end: that we are fighting for better design as part of a better world. In the end our argument is not economic, nor practical, nor even ethical; it is simply biological. We may have the conviction—certainly I have—that there is a final correspondence

between what is efficient and what is beautiful and what is true: a conviction that art is a human contribution to the universal design. But our front is definite, our scope is strict: we concentrate on one aspect of the necessary revolution, while admitting that this necessary revolution is necessarily total. We realize that the vulgarity of which we complain runs through the whole fabric of our civilization. We have no feeling for beauty because we have no respect for truth and goodness. Eric Gill used to say that if we got our moral and religious values right, the rest would follow: beauty would look after herself. With qualifications which involve a whole theory of aesthetics and a whole philosophy of life, I would agree. But at the conclusion of an essay which is already long enough I can only make these bleak affirmations:

*Beauty is a quality in things made—"the radiance of things made as they ought to be made" (GILL).*

*Beauty is therefore something which appeals directly to the senses.*

*An epoch of art becomes possible only when workmen are not concerned to make things beautifully, are not told to make things beautifully, but do so just because they don't know any worse.*

*A great civilization or culture can only arise on the basis of a natural instinct to make things as they ought to be made.*

And that is why I call it a civilization. "from under". I will deal with some of the overtones in the next essay.

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## Civilization and the Sense of Quality

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*It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance, for our consideration and application of these things, and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process.*

HENRY JAMES, *Letters*, II, 508.

ART, as I have so often insisted in these pages, is one of those vague spheres of human activity which escape any very precise definition. Criticism is merely an approximation towards that unattainable end, an endless multiplication of distinctions. One such distinction which is more firmly established than most is that between *art* and *entertainment*. An entertainment is something which distracts us or diverts us from the routine of daily life. It makes us for the time being forget our cares and worries; it interrupts our conscious thoughts and habits, rests our nerves and minds, though it may incidentally exhaust our bodies. Art, on the other hand, though it may divert us from the normal routine of our existence, causes us in some way or other to become conscious of that existence. Matthew Arnold defined poetry as the criticism of life—with a saving clause, if I remember rightly, about “high seriousness”. I do not like the phrase, for it suggests that art is some kind of intellectual activity. Art is rather an expression of our deepest instincts and emotions; it is a serious activity whose end is not so much to divert as to vitalize. I avoid words like “improve” and “uplift” because they only apply to a special kind of art. Art is not necessarily a moral activity, and its tonic effect is

made through the senses. Nevertheless, even in its purest, or most abstract, in Oscar Wilde's sense, its most *useless* forms: in one of Shakespeare's songs, or a minuet by Mozart, or a drawing by Boucher—even then art is radically different from amusement. It does not leave us without affecting us, and affecting us, according to some scale of value, for the better.

This virtue in art is shown by its survival value. Historically speaking, we cannot distinguish a civilization except by its art. At any rate, the more a civilization is subjected to the test of time, the more it is reduced to its works of art. The rest rots away. Even the remote periods of pre-history become vivid for a moment in some cave-drawing or fragment of carved bone. Historical civilization begins with the epic poems Gilgamesh, or the Bible, or Homer. Shards of pottery, painted or incised, are more eloquent than the names of emperors or fields of battle. Cities and fertile lands disappear, but buried in their ruins, in tombs and sanctuaries, we find a vase, a jewel, a few coins, made by the artists of those days, which speak to us in clear language and tell us of the status and character of that lost civilization. They tell us not merely that such and such a people worshipped the sun, or that they fought in chariots, or believed in the resurrection of the dead. These are incidental items of knowledge which we might possibly derive from some other source. But works of art speak more directly to us: for by their form and style they give us a measure of the refinement of a civilization. The aesthetic sense—the faculty by which we appreciate works of art—has its vagaries; at one moment we execrate, say, Gothic architecture, and a century later it is exalted above all other styles. But there is an ideal aesthetic scale of values, just as there is an ideal scale of moral values; and by the measure of this scale all civilizations are given their due rank.

The survival value of art may be readily admitted, but what, the cynic might ask, is the value of survival? What does it matter, what did it matter to the caveman of the Stone Age, or the sculptors of Assyria, or the potters of China, that some remote civilization would disinter their works and judge them good?

Here we face a problem which is fundamental to our faith in the good life. It is the fundamental question which divides mankind into those who believe that all human activity is vain, and leads to no realizable improvement in this world; and those who believe that, however slowly and however tentatively, man has acquired the instruments of self-improvement, and moves towards a more enjoyable world condition.

There is a phrase, the perfectibility of man (probably first used by Godwin or his disciple Shelley) which has been the object of much ridicule on the part of those who despair of mankind, and find perfectability only in divine or unattainable realms of being. It is, obviously, an incautious phrase; a state of perfectibility would be a state of immobility, of final attainment; and it is difficult to conceive of life as thus stabilized. But the phrase does not represent the true doctrine of progress, which is not so much a doctrine as a *myth*. One can take a long view or a short view of the future of mankind. On a short view we can only be practical and realistic: if man improves, it is at a rate to which we cannot accommodate our immediate politics. A precise set of dogmas is probably as much as one generation can cope with. But a belief in progress belongs to a long view of mankind's future: it is a mythical conception quite parallel to the mythical conceptions of religion. It merely substitutes, for a supernatural Kingdom of Heaven to be attained in another world, a Golden Age to be attained in this world. And as a myth it is as good as any other myth; I would claim that it is much more sensible because it is much more human. The dogma of original sin, which is offered as an alternative, would be insupportable did it not have, as a corollary, the promise of salvation through divine intervention; and one may suggest without cynicism that in this case the wish is father to the thought. The myth of progress, on the other hand, has no illegitimate offspring. It is born as a wish, or as a will, and there is no attempt to disguise its innocent and hopeful nature.

The spirit of disillusionment which prevails in our war-

ridden world is probably a reaction to the evolutionary optimism of the nineteenth century. Let us freely admit that much that goes by the name of liberalism is to be identified with that same spirit of optimism. But I think by now we have learned to distinguish between the freedom to do as you like and the duty to create a world of freedom. I see no reason at all why the right to create an artificial scarcity of goods, or the right to exploit native labour in the colonies, should be even remotely associated with the concept of liberty. Liberty and freedom, these values we are now defending, have no economic purpose: they are spiritual values, and as such depend on the fine perceptions of those who guard them. Just as the dogmas of religion depend for their interpretation on fallible human agents, so the ideals of liberty are subject to the same chance. You cannot put on one side certain ideals of life, of conduct, of social order, and say that these represent a divine dispensation to which all men must submit; and on the other side place all other ideals and condemn them as human, all too human. The choice is between the interpretation of dogma, supernatural or divine in origin, and the interpretation of the natural phenomena of life—between faith and reason. In either case the interpreting agent is a human being, and the fallibility inherent in our humanity extends to every range of thought and feeling.

We may therefore reaffirm a rational faith in human progress. But let us be very clear that we do not confuse spiritual with material progress; let us recognize the uncertainty of our aims and the feebleness of our agents; let us proceed with humility and measure. But let us at the same time declare, that throughout all the chances of history, in the face of defeat and despair, in spite of long epochs of darkness and retrogression, man has established faculties which enable him to distinguish between immediate satisfactions and absolute values. He has established a moral sense to guide him in his dealings with his fellow-men and an aesthetic sense to enable him to modify the life of reason; and though the life of reason is still subject to all manner of raids and rebuffs, it exists as a practical ideal, extending to wider and wider circles of humanity, and promising an earthly

paradise never to be attained only because each stage towards its realization creates its superior level.

I have just defined the aesthetic sense as the faculty which enables man to modify the quality of his environment. Quality is, of course, the essential word in this definition. There are other faculties, faculties which might be described as technical or practical, which enable man to modify the *quantity* of his environment: to produce more corn, to utilize more power, to conserve more energy. But these faculties, though they play an important part in the growth of civilization, are not our present concern. I freely admit that in some cases it is difficult to disentangle the two elements: the aesthetic appeal of the Gothic cathedral, for example, depends very directly on the solution of technical problems in building; more obviously, the quality of music has, within certain limits, been governed by the technical perfection of the instruments available.

If we make this distinction between art and the instruments of art, then I think we are bound to admit that whatever progress in art is discernible within historical times is due to an improvement in its instruments rather than to any change in the instinct which operates them. The difference between a bushman's engraving of an antelope and the drawing of a similar animal by Pisanello is fully explained by the difference between a sharpened flint working on the surface of a rock and a silver-point pencil working on parchment. The civilizations behind these two manifestations of the aesthetic sense bear no comparison; but the aesthetic sense is the same. Similarly, who would be bold enough to say that the poetry of Tennyson, or even of Shakespeare, showed any qualitative advance on the poetry of Homer? Whatever art we examine, we are driven to this conclusion: that the underlying faculty or impulse is relatively constant; that the variations are due to the accidents of time and circumstance which release this impulse or faculty. The faculty with which we are endowed must be educated, encouraged, provided with suitable instruments and a rewarding material. Art does not, like technical



skill, arise from the necessities of a situation: it is not an invention. Alas, it is perfectly possible for the whole process of civilization to carry on without art. "To carry on"—the phrase has a provisional ring; and from a wider point of view it is equally certain that a civilization without art will perish—perish materially and fade from the memory of mankind.

Art is grace, art is form, art is—among all possible manners of doing or making a thing—the most memorable. That particular manner of doing or making a thing is memorable because it stimulates our senses, because it brings human inventions within measurable distance of organic growth, because for a moment the will of man seems to be identified with the universal forces of life.

Art redeems our actions from monotony and our minds from boredom. We have to make things and to do things in order to live, but the routine of this endless repetition of menial tasks would dull the senses and deaden the mind unless there was the possibility of doing things and making things with a progressive sense of quality. That sense of quality is the aesthetic sense, and in the end the aesthetic sense is the vital sense, the sense without which we die.

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## A Solemn Conclusion

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*There are no abstract truths—no Mass-Man, no proletariat. There is only Man. When the Pulse has been nailed upon the crossbeams, lo, Reason gives up its viable breath and becomes a wandering ghostly Error. Truth and folly are ever about to expire, so that we, like our beloved Sancho Panza kneeling at the death-bed of Don Quixote, must always be ready to go out to receive the holy communion of cudgels and distaffs, for the rebirth of the Pulse, living anew, in our veins and bones, as the quickened Truth.*

EDWARD DAHLBERG, *Do These Bones Live?*  
(New York, 1941).

EVER since democracy became a clear political conception, in the city-state of Athens, democratic philosophers have been faced with the anomaly of the artist. It has seemed to them that the artist, by his very nature, cannot be accommodated within the structure of an egalitarian community. He is inevitably a social misfit, allied to the neurotic, and to rational thinkers like Plato it has seemed that the only solution is to banish him from the community. A modern rationalist would probably recommend that he should be cured of his neurosis.

There are two main problems: (1) What is it that seems to *separate* the artist from the rest of the community, making him unique among men? (2) What is it nevertheless which *reconciles* the community to this separatist individual—that is to say, what values does the artist contribute to the community which make the community accept or tolerate his presence among them?

The essays which are collected in this volume return again and again to these problems, and by way of conclusion I would like to attempt a general summary of the view I have put forward.

We ought first to decide whether the artist is physically unique. We know that mankind is divisible into various distinct psychological types, and that these types have a basis in physiological factors. Is the artist such a type? There is a certain amount of evidence which suggests that he is. We know that some musicians possess what is called "absolute pitch". It is a natural disposition, which is inherited and which cannot be acquired. A similar faculty in poets and plastic artists is not so commonly recognized, but nevertheless it exists. In poetry it is an absolute awareness of the identity of word and image, and in the plastic arts it probably takes the form of what we call "an intuitive sense of proportion", with or without an intuitive sense of colour harmony, and these "senses" are strictly analogous to the musician's absolute pitch. These facts, although incompletely investigated, must, I think, be admitted. But it must also be admitted that they are not essential. Several famous composers have been without absolute pitch, and there have certainly been poets without absolute identity of word and image—in fact, to insist on such an identity, in view of the limitations of language, would considerably restrict the range of poetry. One can also easily think of great painters whose colour sense has been defective, and of great architects who have had to rely on consciously applied canons of proportion. In the end, the most that one would be able to claim is that the possession of such unique gifts merely gives special quality to the work of a particular artist.

Apart from the occasional possession of such physiological peculiarities, it is obvious that the artist is not a separate psychological type. There are introvert and extravert artists, schizophrenic and manic-depressive artists. In fact, every psychological type is potentially an artist—which is only another way of agreeing with Eric Gill that every man is a special kind of artist.

The acceptance of this fact—and I for one do accept it—

involves us logically in an admission that art is skill: a man does something so well that he is entitled to be called an artist. We are still left with a wide scope for argument, for we must ask what that something is: what is the purpose of that skill?

It was at this point that Gill and I, in our prolonged discussions, used to diverge, for I would insist that art is not merely skill to make, but also skill to express. Express what? Gill would ask, and if I was careless enough to use a phrase such as: "To express his personality", Gill would be at me with the mallet and chisel he kept in his mind no less than in his hands, demanding if I had ever seen a personality, and how in God's name it could be expressed except in the making of something useful. And so the argument went on, to its inconclusive end. But I still maintain that there is a sense in which art is expression, and not merely making, and it is important that I should maintain my point, because it bears directly on this problem of the artist and society. For it is not sufficient to say that the artist is a skilled worker, and that he will always be valued by the community because his skill is useful. The truth is that the artist is very often (oftenest when he is greatest) offering something to the community which the community does not want to accept, which the community at first finds very unpalatable.

The mistaken presentation of my point of view, of which I have myself been guilty in the past, is to describe art as *self-expression*. If every artist merely expresses the uniqueness and separateness of his self, then art might be disruptive and disintegrating, and anti-social. A lot of art in the past has been of that kind, and has given rise to the whole problem of "dilettantism". The dilettante is the curse of our civilization—the parasite of culture which Gill and I united in consigning to hell. A social art can never be dilettante art—dilettante art can never be social.

Obviously the great artist who is not merely making something, like a carpenter or a cobbler, but expressing something, like Shakespeare or Michael Angelo or Beethoven, is expressing something bigger than his *self*. Self-expression, like self-seeking, is an illusion. It is the action of an individual who

pits himself against the community, who says I am bigger, or better, or stronger than other men, and will therefore enslave them, make them serve my individual purposes. But a democracy would be right to resent the presence of such individuals in its midst, for democracy as I conceive it starts from the proposition that all men are equal—if this mystical statement is not accepted, then the word democracy is being used in a sense which I do not regard as legitimate. For me the word democracy always implies, not only liberty and fraternity, but also equality.

Society expects something more than self-expression from its artists, and in the case of great artists such as those I have mentioned, it gets something more. It gets something which might be called life-expression. But the "life" to be expressed, the life which is expressed in great art, is precisely the life of the community, the organic group consciousness. It is the artist's business to make the group aware of its unity, its community. He can do this because he, more than other men, has access to the common unconsciousness, to the collective instincts which underlie the brittle surface of convention and normality. I cannot say why the artist should have this gift, any more than I can say why he has absolute pitch, etc. It is probably a consequence of his early upbringing, the actual course of his adaptation to society in earliest infancy—the complicated process which psychoanalysis is slowly reconstructing. Whatever the explanation, the function of the artist in modern society is much the same as that of the medicine-man or magician in a primitive society: he is the man who mediates between our individual consciousness and the collective unconsciousness, and thus ensures social re-integration. It is only in the degree that this mediation is successful that a true democracy is possible.

This office of mediation cannot be forced upon the artist. His function is catalytic—he aids the social revolution without himself undergoing any change, without being absorbed by the social substance. That, it seems to me, is the central doctrine of Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*,

which is probably the most careful definition of the poet's function ever made. I don't think there are any essential problems of the artist in a modern society which we do not find anticipated there. The *Preface* was first published in 1800—at a time, that is to say, very comparable to our own. Two years earlier, in 1798, Wordsworth's political consciousness had reached a crisis—he had experienced a final disillusionment with the French Revolution. The crisis for so many poets and artists of to-day has come after a similar interval and is of exactly the same nature. The signing of the pact between Germany and Russia was probably the breaking-point, but the Moscow trials and executions, and a gradual realization that the Russian Revolution had followed precisely the same course as the French Revolution, had created a psychological tension which was bound to break sooner or later. Hundreds of poets and artists of every kind found that their idealism was suddenly dead—betrayed by the cynical politicians who had for so long deceived them. Poets who now turn in on themselves, to discover the truth about the poet and society, begin to tread the same labyrinth as Wordsworth. They might save themselves much trouble by re-reading the *Preface*, weighing it phrase by phrase.

Two particularly relevant phrases to which I would like to draw attention are based on the words "pleasure" and "tranquillity". The second phrase is the more familiar, though it is nearly always distorted in quotation: "*poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity*". The first phrase has not caught the popular imagination so readily, though it is no less striking: "*We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure*".

This second phrase, explains Wordsworth, refers to "the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which (man) knows, and feels, and lives, and moves . . . we have no knowledge, that is, no general principle drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone". Further, "wherever we sympathize with pain, it will be found that the sym-

pathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure”.

This statement, which might have been derived from Epicurus or Lucretius, is also remarkable as an anticipation of Freud's pleasure-principle. (Cf.: “We may put the question whether a main purpose is discernible in the operation of the mental apparatus; and our first approach to an answer is that this purpose is directed to the attainment of pleasure. It seems that our entire psychic activity is bent upon *procuring pleasure* and *avoiding pain*, that it is automatically regulated by the pleasure-principle.”—*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p. 298.) But we are concerned now with the function which Wordsworth gives this pleasure-principle in the process of poetic activity.<sup>1</sup>

It is a function which enables us to return to the artist the uniqueness which we began by taking away from him. Gill, we saw, went so far as to suggest that there is no essential difference between the artist and the artisan—between, shall we say, Shakespeare and the carpenter who made his second-best bed. And we came to the conclusion that there may not have been much difference in the quality of their skill: the carpentry of the plays is not above criticism, and the second-best bed was well enough made to be specified in the poet's last will and testament. What, then, did Shakespeare possess that was denied to this carpenter?

There is no mystery about it: it was the capacity to work in psychological material, to make a work of art out of more than words: out of human desires and emotions, fears and fantasies.

<sup>1</sup> According to Wordsworth, the following stages are involved :

- (1) The origin of the process : emotion recollected in tranquillity.
- (2) Contemplation of this recollection continued until, “ by a species of reaction ”, the tranquillity gradually disappears and is replaced by
- (3) an emotion, *kindred* to that which was before the subject of contemplation.
- (4) Composition may then occur inducing
- (5) a state of enjoyment, whatever the nature of the emotion that is being experienced by the poet.

And that is where the peculiarity and what we recognize as the "greatness" of the artist comes in: for these materials cannot be worked superficially, on the surface. The artist must be ready to delve below the level of normal consciousness, the crust of conventional thought and behaviour, into his own unconscious, and into the collective unconscious of his group or race. It is a painful experience: creative work on this level is only done at a cost of mental anguish. And this is where Wordsworth's perception of the realities of poetic composition becomes so acute; for there is no doubt that the poet's creation, his sympathetic penetration into the tragic significance of life, however painful, "is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure". The artist is always something of a masochist.

He is also an escapist. Wordsworth does not define what he means by tranquillity, but his meaning is obvious enough if we remember his social behaviour and his practice in composition, as described by his sister Dorothy and other witnesses. Tranquillity, for Wordsworth, meant literally a flight from society; and the actual moment of composition meant a flight from even those members of his household with whom he habitually dwelt.

The modern practice has, of course, been quite the contrary. We have been exhorted to go out into the streets, into the factories, even actually to become proletarians or workmen.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "It's been often said that an author must go and study production. But it does not mean that some fellow . . . having bought a sixpenny note-book, goes to the factory, gets into everybody's way, gets into a mess among machinery and then writes all sorts of rubbish in the newspapers. . . . I believe that you have got to actually work in production, but if that is not possible at least take part in all the everyday occurrences of the working class. I understand this work about the importance of obeying the slogans about safety, those that tell you not to put your hand into machinery, the greatest care about electric currents endangering the life of the workmen, care that nails should not be left lying on staircases, not to touch engineering belts, etc. This appeals to my pen and my rhymes and I consider it's more important than the most inspired themes of the long-haired lyricists."—Vladimir Mayakovsky. From *Mayakovsky and his Poetry*, compiled by Herbert Marshall (London, 1942).



We have been exhorted to fight in Spain, to sit under the bombs, to sleep in shelters, to join the Home Guard. None of these conditions ensure "tranquillity"—there is, in fact, no tranquillity in the modern world, least of all, perhaps, in the "comparative safety" of New York or Hollywood.

Wordsworth's precept has been powerfully reinforced nearer our time by Rilke, in those *Letters to a Young Poet* which are so full of profound wisdom. "I can give you no other advice", said Rilke to his correspondent, "than this: retire into yourself and probe the depths from which your life springs up. . . . For the creative artist must be a world unto himself and find everything in himself and in Nature, of which he is part and parcel." And again: "Love your loneliness, and *endure the pain* which it causes you *with harmonious lamentations* (*schoenklingender Klage*). The word *Einsamkeit* (loneliness, solitariness, tranquillity) recurs like a refrain through all these letters, and indeed through all Rilke's work. It will be remembered that Milton also spoke movingly of "a calm and pleasing solitariness".

Rilke, it might be objected, was writing in 1903, when solitariness could be found, if not easily, at least possibly. But that artificial isolation, which I have called fortress-solitude, is not the same thing as Rilke's *Einsamkeit* or Wordsworth's tranquillity or Milton's solitariness. It is not, in Rilke's phrase, bound to Nature—by which he means a natural way of living. In such fast seclusion the poet cannot be, in Wordsworth's phrase, "a man speaking to men". It may seem unreasonable to non-poetic people, but what the poet nevertheless demands is a kind of society in which tranquillity, withdrawal, is a natural right. He must be able to go into the press and out of it as easily as he passes from his own house into the street. The charge he makes against the modern world is that it has invaded his house of quiet, invaded it with cares and rumours, insistent politics and totalitarian wars.

The poet is therefore compelled to demand, *for poetic reasons*, that the world shall be changed. It cannot be said that his demand is unreasonable: it is the first condition of his existence as a poet.

But the poet must realize that the changes promised by all the existing political parties are not valid for him. They do not guarantee his solitude. They all imply a more exacting social contract, a more complete surrender of individual liberty: surrender to the state, surrender to the curiosity of the press, surrender to mass opinions and mass standards. The direction must be reversed—political power must be distributed among the counties, the cities, the villages and the parishes—distributed and broken into human, tangible units. Economic power must be distributed among the guilds and workshops. Financial power must be altogether excluded from society. Productive labour must be recognized as the basic reality, and honoured as such. That is why the poet must be an anarchist. He has no other choice. He may temporize with liberalism, with democratic socialism, with state socialism; and in peaceful times any of these political systems may be persuaded to patronize culture, including poetry. But they cannot inspire culture, they cannot guarantee the creative activity of the poet. For the last thing they can afford to guarantee is the solitude of the poet, which is a withdrawal from the social contract, a denial of the principle of collectivism. It is a bitter lesson to learn, for those poets who have put their faith in the non-poetic prophets—in Marx, in Lenin, in Hitler. Poets should not go outside their own ranks for a policy; for poetry is its own politics.

Shelley called poets the *unacknowledged* legislators of the world, and the epithet was well chosen. The catalyst is unchanged, unabsorbed; its activity therefore not acknowledged. It is peculiarly difficult for the artist in society to accept this thankless task: to stand apart, and yet to mediate: to communicate to society something as essential as bread or water, and yet to be able to do so only from a position of insulation, of disaffection. Society will never understand or love the artist, because it will never appreciate his indifference, his so-called objectivity. But the artist must learn to love and understand the society which renounces him. He must accept the contrary experience, and drink, with Socrates, the deadly cup.